

# VISION



OF TOMORROW

JUNE 5/-

**Rebel Planet**  
**Peter L. Cave**

• EDDIE JONES •

# VISION OF TOMORROW

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## THINGS TO COME . . .



ECHOES OF ARMAGEDDON by Lee Harding, a powerful novelette of future war. Other fine material by R. J. Tilley, Chris Priest, John Brunner and others, plus outstanding features.

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All story illustrations by EDDIE JONES

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# EDITORIAL

## *The strangest beings*

One of the most interesting things about science fiction is that there are so many types of stories. We of this magazine are attempting to cover the whole field as widely and entertainingly as possible. We hope that in this issue you will find something to really grip you. Of course, nobody can please everybody all of the time so, for some of you there may be a story in which you have little interest. In such a case spare the poor author and editor and remember that 'one man's meat . . .' is the best criterion.

Science fiction authors have all the universe in which to work, all the complexities of time and space to unravel, the mysteries of strange beings, not the least strange of which is man himself. Man's inhumanity to man is a strange and terrible reality and in *THE BITTER PILL* A. Bertram Chandler imagines a grim future when all people over forty-five years are made second-class citizens. We think that this story will be remembered as one of the most significant stories we have published.

Harold G. Nye extrapolates human nature into a future space age, whilst new authors Eddy Bertin and Peter Oldale explore the darker corners of the human mind. Peter Cave's cover story, on the other hand, is set in a far corner of the galaxy. Frank Bryning's *ELECTION* and E. C. Tubb's *A MATTER OF SURVIVAL* both underscore the fact that sometimes the most obvious route is the hardest to discover. *MUSICAL* by old favourite Syd Bounds describes an alien invasion with power and economy.

Eight science fiction stories, each of them different, but all of them with that element of humanity essential to good fiction. As editor I insist on it. Whether the stories

succeed or fail in the final analysis however, is for you the reader to decide and comment upon. In doing you can help both authors and editor to provide the best possible magazine. Next issue we shall introduce a new feature, *SCIENCE FICTION FORUM*, wherein both readers and writers will have their say about science fiction in general, and this magazine in particular.

*Philip Harbottle*





*The Earth was becoming chaotic and unmanageable, and in the midst of it all was . . .*

# THE CHANGER

## Harold G. Nye

Martha Brogan munched her toast and marmalade and scowled at her husband. He was hunched forward over the table, his hands cradling the portable newscreen like an acolyte with an avatar. She could just make out the upside-down pages of the Trading Section as he thumbed them along.

His eyes lit up suddenly, and he pressed a small button on the side of the machine to hold down a particular page.

She frowned. Had her fleshy brows been any heavier they would have made an audible noise as they crammed together.

'Edward,' she began, meaning to sound a note of caution, but her mouth—still occupied with some scraps of toast—managed only to seem displeased. 'You're not thinking of Changing again?'

He shrugged, but did not look up. Why not? He became bored very easily.

Martha dropped a remnant of toast onto her plate. She had lost her appetite for breakfast, and had begun to seethe inside. She was a plump, sturdy little woman, and there was plenty of scope for seething.

Why was it, she asked herself, that whenever they became nicely settled into a new neighbourhood, Edward wanted to Change? It was so inconsiderate. Resettlement never seemed to bother him at all; no matter to him that it sometimes caused her grievous discomfort. He was a selfish idealist.

Most men were content with three or four Changes in a lifetime. Not so Edward Brogan. In the last two years he had switched his profession seven times, moving anxiously from one job to the next and unable to settle down to anything for more than a few months at a time. He was an inveterate job-changer. His mind twitched, so he dabbled vicariously in one trade after another, consolidating none and giving his long-suffering wife no reason to expect that he would ever settle down to anything permanent.

'Well, I don't know,' she complained. 'What is it *this* time?'



Even this small show of interest drew him out. His face lit up and he spoke in quick, excited movements, like some pet creature newly endowed with an ability to speak. 'Somebody here wants to ExChange with a psychologist,' he announced. There was no significant red light alongside the advertiser's name, so the position would still be available. His fingers fidgeted nervously with the newscreen while he explained.

He had been in his current occupation for more than three months. Already he seemed to have exhausted its potential and the familiar dull ennui had begun to settle around him.

'I see.' Her words were weighted down with resignation. 'And what does *he* do?'

Edward sniffed. He was a spare, bony little man, and with him such gestures were significant. 'He's a shuttle pilot...' And probably bored with the great unwinking lights of space; anxious to deal more directly with people, instead of considering them as so much anonymous mass/ratio.

Martha looked dour. *That figured.* Always something glamorous for her Edward. No steady job for him. In the past few years he had been, in turn, a brain surgeon, a biologist, a minister of religion (non-denominational), a dealer in antiques, a sanitary inspector in the Antarctic basin, a castrati at the Metropolitan Opera (for two seasons), chief engineer on an under-surface vessel, a town-planner and, of late, a psychologist. It followed that, with his penchant for the unusual and romantic, he would one day think of riding one of the wild stallions of the sky.

'Does this mean we'll have to shift?' She managed to look both distressed and indignant simultaneously. 'That we'll have to go through all that business *again*?'

'I don't know. I'm not... sure. Shuttle pilots can't be all *that* far removed from our current social level. We'll probably only have to shift house...'

Martha groaned, and left the table.

Edward didn't mind. Domestic confrontation bored him. It was much more rewarding to contemplate a change of profession.

Anxiously, he pressed a key on the face of the newscreen. Immediately a small red light sprang into position alongside the shuttle pilot's advertisement. Edward rubbed his hands together happily.

His call was registered with Change Centre at precisely nine fifty-three a.m.

His prime identity was checked out, his current social status and occupation corroborated, and the sum of this information coded and fed into an auxiliary computer.

Somewhere in this great network of machines, the shuttle pilot's application was subjected to a similar treatment. Their cards converged deep in the bowels of the master computer, where they were again examined, cross-indexed and re-shuffled. At ten-seven the ExChange had been ratified and the preliminary preparations had been instigated.



Both parties were notified of an Acceptance and required to be present in person at the Centre at approximately eleven-fifteen.

At ten twenty-seven Edward Brogan kissed his wife goodbye from force of habit, and marched off to meet his new destiny.

He didn't have very far to walk. A hovering skimmer, poised like some shiny steel bird waiting for a meal, pounced down and threw open its door. Edward climbed aboard and was whisked away over the golden rooftops of suburbia towards the towering ramparts of the city.

Change Centre was busy. It was Monday morning and already the great building overflowed with the bored and the jaded, the indolent and the graciously unemployed, all seeking the solace and excitement of Change.

The many floors were honeycombed with private cubicles, where white-coated attendants nursed the machines in their delicate operations, ensuring that the delicate business was completed with the minimum of inconvenience.

Edward was admitted to one of these cubicles, and somewhere, in another part of the complex honeycomb, his alter-ego, the shuttle pilot, entered an identical room. They were both quickly surrounded by gleaming silver machines. Under the cautious discretion of a Master Physician (male), they began the delicate process of ExChange.

Edward was strapped into a large chair and anaesthetised.

The first machine shaved a small section of his scalp.

The second machine extruded a manipulative tool. Fine wire probes spread out from this member and burrowed deeply into his skull, and did not stop until they had found the royal throne of his intelligence.

The third and fourth machines were responsible for the complex business of extracting the relevant DNA molecules from his mind, those that contained the sum of his psychological knowledge. They withdrew it painlessly, leaving his mind bereft of the skill he had only recently acquired.

Another machine stepped in and checked out what remained of the molecular chain, making doubly sure that no tricky residue remained that might worry and confuse the patient, and then it moved away. The first and second machines returned to repair the surgery and awaken the patient.

The memory molecules were coded, cross-checked with the original donor and shuttled off to another part of the Centre, where the shuttle pilot had undergone an identical operation.

Twin vials moved through a vast network of communicating tubes. One popped out into the waiting orifice of one of the waiting machines. It gulped down, analysed and assimilated the pilot's molecules, and moved over to Edward's unconscious figure.

It extruded twin manipulative members, from which fine wire probes radiated; hollow, so that the precious fluid could flow freely into Edward's mind, where it

would be assembled and linked up with all the other molecules that made up the latticework of his memory.

For the second time his skull was invaded, and when the probes withdrew it was with the knowledge that the shuttle pilot's technical memory was now established in Edward Brogan's mind.

It was exactly twelve seventeen and a half, and the medical process of ExChange was complete. There remained only the personal business of re-orientation to work out.

Edward bounced awake and felt, in all respects save the vital one that mattered, a thoroughly *new* man.

They would never tamper with the substance of his identity—morally, this was forbidden, and the edict religiously enforced—but already his mind bubbled with a fresh influx of experience.

But this euphoria was but a prelude. Only when he was strapped down into a shuttle ship would he begin to experience the full awareness of his new profession.

They gave him his new papers and assigned him to a space-field. He thanked them and hurried home.

He found Martha already changed into a vivid floral pants suit. A gaudy red wig fell half-way down her wide shoulders. Her face was brightly painted, but the effect was unreal; she looked like an over plump child with her mother's face.

'The instructions arrived a little while ago,' she explained. 'Oh, Edward, it's going to be such a *gay* new neighbourhood!'

He had to smile to himself. His wife always faced a resettlement disagreeably until the actual moment of departure, and then some of the vicarious thrill of Changeover seemed to infect her. Perhaps, after four drab months sitting around the house while he conversed airily (and to nobody in particular) about an obscure branch of medicine called human psychology, she was looking forward to living in a more swinging society. And so she should. Change was, after all, the very new spice of this very new society. And neighbours had always counted a lot with Martha. For himself, well, he had never really cared, one way or the other.

He went straight to his room, and was busy changing into the regulation green and white striped leisure uniform of his new profession, when he felt the house give an ungainly lurch to one side.

'Damn,' he swore. *Those stabilisers should have been fixed last overhaul*... Oh well, Immigration just wasn't as reliable as it used to be. He made a mental note to file a complaint just as soon as they were re-located, and finished struggling with his maroon cravat.

The house swagged from side to side as it strained to right itself. Out in the day room Martha gave a little squeal of fright.

'Take it easy,' he called out, more to discourage her from scampering towards him, and pawing at his nice new uniform, than to allay her distrust of the house. 'It'll sort itself out in a minute...'

And it did, eventually, and managed a reasonably smooth take-off. It staggered up into the sun-drenched

sky, license number writ large on its shiny black under side, and then, after hovering for a few moments like some blind, stupid bird, it turned around and waddled off in the general direction of the south-eastern suburbs.

Hardly had it begun to accelerate when another dwelling swooped down from the sky and settled into the newly vacated allotment.

The shuttle pilot's house extruded its power tubes and was soon plugged comfortably into place, like a shiny new filling in a denture.

Changeover was now complete.

The next day, Edward Brogan began a two-week period of training and re-orientation at the National Space Centre. The object of this crash course was to check out his inherited memory and see that it functioned compatibly with his physical body during the rigours of space-flight.

He came through with flying colours, but not before they had made some vital modifications that would make his admittedly small tasks easier.

They made him a few inches taller and lengthened his arms a fraction. They snipped a quarter of an inch off both index fingers and lengthened his thumbs. They added a minimum light-weight muscle amplifier to his suit, so that he could manipulate the necessary controls with the required degree of flexibility, and then pumped his mind full of drugs to ensure that he made a smooth psychological adaptation to his new and unfamiliar environment.

But apart from all this they left him much as they found him, and that was a pleasant change. When he recalled some earlier adjustment surgery—that re-shaping of his face to give it the required benignity quality that was desirable for a religious missionary, and those two seasons at the Met: yike!—well, he had to admit that he had gotten off lightly this time.

When they were satisfied that his reorientation was favourable, they entered him in the Pilot Pool. Four days later he had his first taste of space flight.

It was only sub-orbital, but at least it was a beginning. He exulted when they broke free of the atmosphere and the sky went all black and portentous and peppered with diamonds. This was what it really felt like to shrug off the burden of gravity!

Shuttling, he discovered, was a relatively simple affair. The nearby space around Earth was cluttered with satellites: hotels, gambling casinos, pleasure resorts—even scientific laboratories. It was his job to ferry tourists and supplies as the case may be, to each and every one of these glittering islands in space.

Below him, the Earth had become a child's toy. It seemed hardly real any more.

'And what was it like?' Martha wanted to know.

He had tried to tell her, to explain something of the vast nature of this new universe he had discovered, but the words would not unravel themselves from the knotted yarn of his inarticulate thoughts. All he could manage was to speak, briefly and ineffectively, of the

wild wonder of the stars, of the gaudy pleasure satellites, when what she really wanted to know was what were the people *wearing* up there, and what did they *do*?

So he gave up. Life, for Martha Brogan, was measured out in brightly coloured pieces of cloth and the manners of the moment: these were the all-encompassing trivia that maintained her useless life.

He faced her with disinterest. With the loss of his psychological skill a gulf had re-opened between them. But had there ever been anything more, really? Was it possible for any two people to experience anything more lasting in this busy new world that man had made?

His second trip was stunning. Now that he had become familiar with the technical responsibilities, he found that he had more time to relax and watch the slow-moving dance of the stars and the forest of junk that man had thrown up around his world.

His third was a milk run.

Not surprisingly, he slept all through the fourth on automatic pilot. The cold bright eyes of the galaxy had, too soon, become as impersonal as the Earth. They were much too far away to *touch*.

On his fifth voyage he fidgeted—all the way up and down.

And it was on his sixth trip that he realised he was horribly, irrevocably *bored*. The universe had become his backyard. A sense of failure, of—and this was much worse—of *bad choice*, assailed him. Whatever had prompted him to become romantic about the dreary routine of space-travel?

Naturally, Martha was upset when he told her of his plans. She had only really begun walking on her new social treadmill. Whenever he was home he found himself subjected to a tiresome round of house-parties: bright, painted people with bright, painted thoughts.

Nothing seemed real any more.

Martha looked down at the newscreen in his hands and burst into ineffectual tears. 'You don't *love* me any more...' she wailed.

He said nothing. He was much too busy paying attention to the morning's Trading Section.

His wife burst into uncontrolled sobbing. It was unbecoming, and it made a multi-coloured mess of her body paint.

'You don't laaaaaaarve me...!'

'Nonsense,' he snapped.

'You don't, you *don't*, you *DON'T*! Never have, or you wouldn't have treated me like you have, hopping about from one blasted thing to another. What sort of life do you think that is?' Her look of outraged humiliation changed suddenly to an exclamation of shock, horror and, finally animal cunning. Her eyes narrowed and squeezed out a few last tears.

'You know what you are?' she snarled. 'You know what you are, Edward Brogan? A Change addict! That's what you are—a goddamned Change addict!'

She stormed out of the room.

Edward let her go. He was much too preoccupied with finding himself a new profession to allow her tan-

trums to disturb him. The pages were peppered with red lights this morning; business must be brisk.

He studied the advertisements anxiously. He was bored and desperately needed a way out.

He found one. A glaciologist in Northern Siberia also wanted out. He had been there for seven and a half years and was in need of a Change; something exciting. And he wanted to swap with a shuttle pilot...

Delighted, Edward pushed the switch on the front of the newscreen. A red light lit up immediately alongside the glaciologist's name. Edward leaned back in his chair with his hands behind his head, to wait. There was a look of relief on his tired face.

But his application was refused.

Stunned, he could only stare in disbelief at the little card his home computer pumped out.

Rejected. But why? This had never happened before. He was re-submitting his application for the fifth time when the Change Officers arrived.

'You will have to come with us for a little while,' one of them explained. He looked most impressive, Martha thought, in his dark blue uniform with the silver piping. 'You have an appointment with the Administration.'

'But... but I don't understand!' Edward protested. 'I...'

'It will only take a short while. Please, this way.'

He had lost the willpower to move, and so was forced to suffer the indignity of having two of them carry him out to a waiting skimmer. Dazed, he saw his wife waving happily as the sleek craft took to the air.

'She... she betrayed me,' he mumbled, unable yet to fully comprehend what was happening.

'Not so,' one of the officers corrected. 'You betrayed yourself. To the Change computers. You just can't argue with statistics...'

Edward Brogan slumped back in his seat and stared straight ahead with dull, unseeing eyes.

Change Centre loomed up ahead of them. The pilot swung the skimmer in a wide arc that took them around to the rear of the building, and down through the sub-levels, to a region he had never frequented and had not even known existed.

He was calmer now. His panic had evaporated and only the dull ache of defeat gnawed away at his bones. He tried to face his fate as best he could, although he remained confused and disturbed as to the actual nature of his transgression. This was a benevolent society; one only saw the Officers of the Law once in a lifetime.

The skimmer came to rest, finally, in a low, dim-lit parking lot. The door swung open. Two of the men helped Edward Brogan to alight, and stepped a little to one side to allow two white-coated attendants to step forward.

One took his arm gently. The other sprayed the misty contents of a small canister into his face, with deft, precise movements of his hands. Edward breathed in, closed his eyes, and fell forward slowly.

In the next few seconds he was vaguely aware of being lifted, and carried somewhere, and cared for, but even these disordered sensations were soon swept away by the pleasant unconsciousness that enveloped him.

When he came to he was sitting in a comfortable armchair. There was an attendant on either side of him, standing quite still with their hands crossed in front of them.

Edward blinked. He did not recognise the man on the other side of the desk, facing him. That he was a senior Administrator was beyond doubt; he had the face and the manner of a man accustomed to the manipulation of great power. At the moment he was regarding Edward with a solemn, fixed expression. He saw that he was conscious and gave a slow shake of his head, as though he had come to some unavoidable decision.

'Well, Mr. Brogan, you have acted in an unimaginative manner. Now we have to try and salvage something from the mess you have made of your life...'

'But I don't understand!' Edward protested. 'I... I haven't done anything! My application for Changeover was refused. I... I was merely re-submitting when—the Officers arrived.'

'Your application was rejected,' the Administrator explained, 'because you had exceeded the limit.'

'Limit? I did not know there was any limit.'

'Of course not. It is not always wise to publicise these things. But let us take a look at your record, Mr. Brogan. Our records indicate that you have Changed fourteen times in the last five years—and four of those have been in the last *six months*. Your actual total is more than twice that amount. In fact, Mr. Brogan, you have been Changing constantly since you reached your majority. Have you any reason for this behaviour?'

'I... I have been unsettled,' Edward stammered evasively.

'Quite so. And that is what we must try to correct. You were born into a wasteful family, Mr. Brogan. They indulged your every whim because they had the wealth to do so. You began experimenting with Change just as soon as you could—and, inevitably, as it has for so many, it became a habit. In some cases it becomes a positive addiction—and that is when we feel morally obligated to step in, to try and salvage some of the prime personality before what value remains has been frittered away. This sort of addiction, you will understand, is brought about by the individual's unwillingness to cope with his environment.

'You are a child of abundance, Mr. Brogan, and this affluent society of ours was your midwife. Your parents were overindulgent and allowed your adolescent whims full rein, and continued to do so dangerously far into your manhood. You did not study for degrees, you *acquired* them. Several, in fact. Change made it possible. Originally, Change was introduced to enable professional people to switch over to some other occupation when they felt their interests were becoming jaded. Instead of having to go through the laborious process of studying a new craft, they could absorb it immediately and



directly from the memory of a colleague—if he wished to Exchange *with* them. In the majority of cases their new occupation reinforced their prime occupation and, after a period in this new environment, they returned with new enthusiasm to their original work. Others adapted so well to their new roles that they went on to be even more successful in their second careers than in their first. And so on. The mistake was in allowing this boon to be bestowed upon mankind in general; we didn't understand, then, what a colossal opiate we were releasing. We have evolved less than a single generation since the introduction of Change, and already the Earth has become chaotic and nearly unmanageable. But we do what we can, Mr. Brogan; we do what little we can.'

But Edward Brogan understood very little of what he had heard. His mind was unused to such subtlety. All he was concerned with was the bleak, awful future that lay before him; a future without Change.

'Oh, don't look so *morose*,' the Administrator said, brightly. 'It isn't quite so hopeless as you think.'

'Then what . . . do you intend to do with me?'

'Educate you, if we can. You see, each time we withdraw your inherited memories, we also remove the *experience* that has accumulated with the knowledge. Without knowing it, Mr. Brogan, you have tricked yourself out of most of what makes life worth living, even in this faceless age. You have had the experience, but you have missed the meaning. And the only way we can rectify that is to begin at the beginning. You must *study*, you must *learn*, if you are to survive; and with no recourse to Change, ever again.

'We call this withdrawal. And in some cases it works. I hope it will for you. I hope we have not left it . . . too late.'

Edward gazed across at him with no vestige of hope in his dull eyes. 'What is it . . . that I have to do?'

The Administrator shrugged. 'Either of two things. You may have your professional memory erased and begin at the very bottom of the ladder, or you may retain your present trade and work up from there, according to your ability. Some skills can be taught, Mr. Brogan, but interpretive genius is another thing. It will be interesting for us—and for yourself—to see how you manage. Well, what is it to be?'

Edward was shaking. His hands would not keep still. The concept of life without the benevolence of Change was unthinkable, and yet . . . it must be faced, if survival

mattered. And he was rather surprised to discover that it *did*.

'Space is big,' the other man intoned. 'There are more worlds than this to conquer. You could do it quite well if you put your mind to it. You're forty-two years old and, in our present society, that leaves you with a good two-thirds of your life before you. Why not stick to this last of your professions? Change will always be there, Edward; the eternal change that shapes and governs us all, only this time you will have to work for it. Well, what do you say?'

Edward licked his dry lips and took the plunge. 'I think . . . yes, I think I'll let things stand . . . as they are.' He could not bear the pain of going back so far; all his life would become meaningless. If he could keep at least this one small achievement, then everything else would have been worthwhile.

'Good.' The Administrator leaned back and relaxed. He nodded briefly to the two attendants and they slipped unobtrusively away.

'I . . . I'd like to hear some more details, if I may,' Edward asked. 'This has all been . . . rather confusing.'

'Yes. Yes, of course.' And to himself the Administrator wondered: have we saved this one? How will he make out? And if he does, how will he feel seven years from now, when we tell him that he's eligible for Change, one of the carefully metered-out annuities that await him?

They had learned their bitter lesson well. Sometimes—but this was only when he was a little more depressed than usual—he imagined he could hear a great roaring in his ears: the corporate sound of a Change-crazed world, four and a half billion people stoned out of their minds by this newest opiate.

At such times he shuddered.

Outside they called it the world. But inside—here, in the bowels of Change Centre, the heart and brain and medical centre of all things—they called it Asylum Earth.

'Ah, just a moment, Edward. I have some further details for you . . .' He fumbled in a drawer for the necessary papers.

But Edward Brogan wasn't in any hurry. He was wondering what Martha would think about all this, and what she would have to say when he told her they were not simply moving house, this time, but—Changing worlds.

NEXT MONTH . . .

## FAIRY TALE

by John Brunner

*One of the most unusual science fiction stories ever written!*

# MUSICALE

by SYDNEY J. BOUNDS



• EDDIE JONES •

Now that I have decided, finally, to write this journal, I wonder exactly where to start. The question has to be faced: will these pages ever be found and, if so, by whom? I can write only on the premise that my words will one day be read by human beings—any other assumption is now intolerable.

My name then: I have been known so long by the code-name Simon that I think of myself by that name. And it was as Simon that Carmen knew me. But I was christened Paul; Paul Windsor, of Burnham in the county of Surrey, born 1947.

I regret I cannot date these entries with any accuracy. If a calendar exists, I do not have access to it in the quietness of my sound-proofed cell. I have been so long in silence that I must assume I am a little unbalanced; but not mad, I insist on that despite the claim that sense-deprivation leads to psychosis.

As I look round my underground hide in the light of an oil lamp the first thing I see is, ironically, a print of *The Three Musicians* by Picasso, in the Philadelphia version. The print still holds its colour; gaily reminiscent of carnival time. I stare at the flat cut-out figures of harlequin, pierrot and monk, and horror overwhelms me.

Horror by association, and not due to the bizarre gaiety contrasting with bare insulation-boardings, the stack of empty cans and cartons. The air down here is sour, stuffy, and gives me a permanent headache. It feels damp in my hollowed-out hide beneath the ruined church at the cross-roads, half-buried under tons of rubble and mazed by a warren of secret ways for exit and access.

I have existed alone for weeks, months—who knows?—since Carmen was taken, cut off from the rest of England. Forget the rest of the world. Radio is taboo naturally. I have no contact left with free men anywhere and sometimes wonder if I am truly the last of the few.

Somewhere, I tell myself, others must exist. *Must*. A few isolated people, perhaps even small groups. I cling to this belief during moods of depression, which grow increasingly more frequent as the weeks pass.

For what have I left now? Bare survival if I live as a mouse in a hole. No hope of anything... depression again... I must stir myself to some activity. Get out of here for an hour or two, despite the risk. I shall break off now and venture outside.

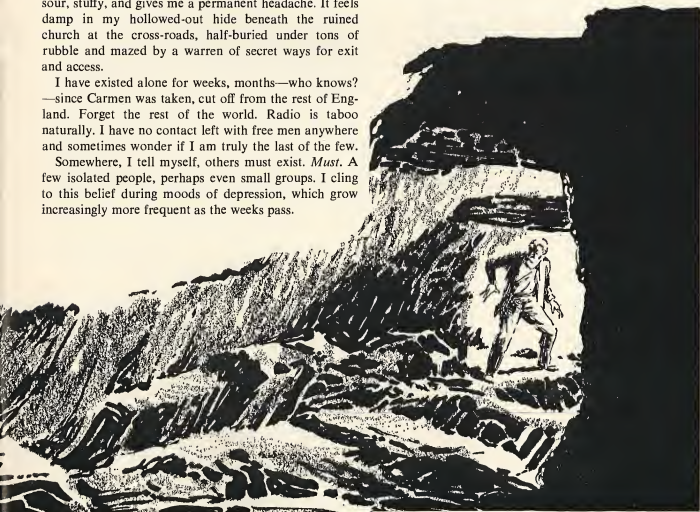
Back again, upset, but not seriously worried. It's possible one of the zombies saw me. If it really was Carmen, she would recognise me and know of this hide...

I had wormed my way up through the tunnel that comes out among the bracken and flopped on my back, staring up at the blue bowl of sky and drifting patchwork of cloud. I lay there, practising hearing; one quickly gets out of the habit, I find.

The birds still sing but their melody has a sour note now. Any melody does. Presently I began to hear the clicking of insects and knew my hearing had sharpened; it was time to move off.

There was no sign of life, but even so, I avoided the road and moved across country, imitating the typical zombie-slouch in case of watchers. Once before I escaped detection by this ruse; to run creates instant suspicion.

The air is fresh and clean, reminding me once again that I really must do something about my hide; though what, I don't quite know.



The countryside grows increasingly wild, reverting back to forest. Trees seem taller—they are certainly more plentiful. Between them, weeds and brush spring up in profusion. Rusting cars are grown over with wild blooms. Looking back, the old church at the cross-roads appears as little more than a crumbling ruin—no-one is going to suspect the mouse below if I am careful.

I reached the outskirts of the village and studied it closely for several minutes. There was no movement so I slipped through the back door of an empty house, climbed the stairs and spied from a window. Brooding quiet lay over the rows of derelict houses. Far off, wild dogs howled, sending a shiver through me. I decided to hurry about my errand and get down to my hide again.

I went warily along the street to the general store, alert for possible booby-traps. The door swung, creaking on one hinge, and I prodded it open. A few rats vanished at my approach. I took up a sack and crammed it with canned meat and fruit, knowing better than to waste time looking for salt; I have my own secret supply. And started back.

The weather held fine though a little overcast. Because of the dogs I decided to take the quicker route, sticking close to the road. I was half-way home when I saw a party of zombies with escorting Musicians, and threw myself flat in the bracken.

The zombies marched closer, shambling automatons that had once been human, their brains deadened by the music from the stars. I had earplugs in my hands, ready to insert at the first wailing note. But I didn't put them in immediately; some warning note might sound. The zombies dragged past.

Then came the Musicians carrying their instruments, as always hard to look at. Seeming two-dimensional with distorted features; caricatures. I watched them by glancing away at a tangent. Direct vision tends to disorientate the senses.

They passed without noticing me and I rose to move on to my hide. Too quickly. I should have waited. One lone zombie straggled behind, thin, haggard. A woman.

I stood, shocked into recognition. *Carmen!* I was sure it was her. She looked straight at me but showed no sign that she knew me. Perhaps she didn't even see me in her zombie state, but it gave me a nasty shock for a moment. I broke and ran. A mistake that, but I saw no followers.

But now I wonder: did she recognise me? It is an unpleasant idea and, to take my mind off it, I shall continue this journal, getting things down in some order, pieced together from different sources as best I can remember.

It began with headlines:

#### ASTRONOMERS SIGHT STRANGE OBJECT FLYING SAUCER FROM THE STARS!

The alien spaceship was sighted a long way from our solar system and astronomers sat on the news for a time: until a popular tabloid ferreted out the discovery and splashed it in seventy-two point. There was instant dis-

belief; wild excitement; panic. As the ship tracked in from interstellar space at nine-tenths light-speed, politicians mumbled platitudes and the military assembled a formidable array of weapons. It took up an orbit beyond Pluto and interest died until a smaller vessel left the starship and homed in on Earth.

Then fear travelled in shock waves round our planet. Riots happened and religions revived; seers prophesied paradise and Armageddon; and a few made ready a welcome.

I was not present when the tender landed on Salisbury Plain, a megalith's throw from Stonehenge, but it is possible to imagine the scene. An army converged to cover the intruder as a cautious group of scientists approached the rhombohedron. And while they waited for the aliens to show themselves, there was plenty of conjecture about what shape they might have; tentacled monsters, silicon-based creatures or what? And how could we communicate with them if they turned out to be truly alien?

The whole world waited, holding its collective breath and watching over teevie.

The tender unfolded, like the petals of a flower, and music came out. Gay, carnival music. The Generals listened, baffled. Everyone else who heard it was entranced. It was captivating music.

Then, after a decent interval, the aliens revealed themselves to a stunned country. Grotesque caricatures of the human form. Two dimensional beings (they seemed to disappear when viewed side-on), with displaced ears and eyes and noses. They were a strain to look at; the brain tended to reject them. Faces like masks and yellow-and-red checked suits.

It was not long before an amateur art critic, watching the scene on a monitor, divined a striking similarity to the figures in *The Three Musicians* by Picasso; and the print boomed overnight.

Crowds came to gaze in wonder, to listen enthralled. The military relaxed. Musicians? No threat there even if the music wasn't martial. All it did was set the feet tapping, hands clapping, limbs jiggling.

It was purely instrumental music. The aliens seemed determined to communicate solely in terms of music; no-one, to this day, has heard them use anything resembling spoken or written language, even among themselves. Of course, a discreet watch was kept on them, and their tender and the orbiting starship out beyond Pluto.

But no obvious threat developed and people flocked to Salisbury Plain, creating the biggest traffic jam on record. The new music caught on fast, and not only with the teen-set. So the aliens came to London, to Broadcasting House, and the BBC unrolled the red carpet for them.

Fortunately for me, at that time, I was in hospital suffering from a painful ear infection that made me temporarily deaf. To me it seemed the staff had gone mad; I can remember matrons dancing between the beds.

The aliens used electronic instruments to make their



weird music; music with a pulsing beat and subtle harmony. For Earth it was one big carnival; streamers fluttered and flags waved; people danced in the streets. The music went on night and day without cease; everyone was in holiday mood, too caught up in an emotional orgy to bother about work.

Complaints came from the tone-deaf; to them it was just another noise. And the totally deaf heard nothing but were shocked by the goings-on—

Vibrations. I must investigate . . .

I am badly worried now. Carmen *did* recognise me. The Musicians are here, up above, sounding away with their instruments. I hope they only suspect I'm below; if they are certain, they will spare no effort to reach me.

It is a double shock. *Carmen*. My own Carmen betrayed me. I can't blame her; now she is one of the zombies she no longer has control over her feelings—but it is still a shock.

I had removed one of the insulation panels and crept up to a prepared peephole, ear-plugs in. Zombies milled about over the whole area, as far as I could see. Carmen with them. And Musicians—God, how I hate them! Can't stand the sight of them. I looked quickly away—these parodies of humans turn my stomach to acid.

Fear clawed at my guts and I wanted to run, but *daren't*. If they penetrate deeply enough they are bound to find some trace of my subterranean existence. I have escape tunnels naturally; using them depends on how far out the zombie cordon is. If even one sees me break cover I'm finished. I may try it after dark.

The music must have been playing and I made doubly certain my plugs were fitted properly, checked my pocket for the spare set. They are all that stand between freedom and slavery.

There's no holiday mood out there now. The carnival is over. Grey faces and gaunt bodies. Earth a graveyard for the living-dead.

The Musicians started to probe the ruins with sonic devices and I withdrew carefully to my sound-proofed cell to wait, hoping they will give up and go away. I still see Carmen's face. Blank.

Nothing more has happened since I came down so I shall continue this history to pass the waiting time.

The Musicians needed little persuasion to broadcast on radio and tveeve, linked up via satellite for a worldwide broadcast. They cut discs and topped every chart, until charts were discontinued. And their music changed insidiously.

It made compulsive listening, literally; programmed to trap human emotion, dominate and channel it, prevent reasoned thought. Soon there was only the weird wailing, and society started to run down like a clock with a broken spring.

Apathy and lethargy set in. All round the world, people stopped whatever they were doing to listen; no work was done anywhere. No crops planted or harvested, factories idle, transport at a standstill. The

human race had heard the Piper from the stars and succumbed. The alien music became a way of life, if you can call it living. The whole world became a pair of ears with nothing in between. Listening became the sole motive for existence.

Except for the few. The deaf. And, at last, the few acknowledged the threat for what it was—invasion—and began to plan countermeasures.

A major vibration shock then—

I broke off to investigate, worming my way to the upper levels. It looks as though the Musicians are serious. They've brought up a digging-machine, zombie-operated, and are busy shifting stone and earth above my head. There was a lot of dust sitting down and I had to stifle a fit of sneezing. But I'm deeper than they guess, and camouflaged. Maybe they'll quit before they reach me. Maybe. I can only wait . . .

I saw Carmen again, her dead-alive face inscrutable as she listened to the star sound. Waiting, I shall continue with this journal.

An ex-General, eardrums shattered in some forgotten war, took command. He recruited and trained a deaf commando. Their first mission was a raid on a nearby barracks to obtain guns and ammunition. Their second, to attack a group of Musicians.

The attack, because unexpected, was successful. But the next . . . they were immediately detected and we learnt that the aliens had other weapons than carnival music. Missiles that fired sonic pellets; the pellets, attaching to the skull-bones, transmitted sound direct to the brain—high-pitched sound that could not be cut off, destroying sanity. The attack disintegrated into a shambles.

There was another reaction; the starship swung out of orbit and made fast time to Earth. Thousands of Musicians swarmed out to complete the take-over. But still a few of us stayed free, hunted, isolated. Myself among them.

Then Jubal, bearded like a prophet out of the past, appeared to lead us. Stone-deaf from birth, a wave of his massive hands was rhetoric. He organised mankind's last resistance, cell by cell; and it was then I received my code-name, for fear of betrayal. We practised lip-reading and sign language.

Carmen joined my cell. A gypsy girl, wild and black-haired and passionate in love and hate. Carmen who became my lover, was caught and now betrays me.

Cell by cell, we dug underground hides, collected weapons. We attacked radio stations and record factories, tried to break the music monopoly. Our losses were heavy, outweighing the small advantage. We withdrew.

'We must wait,' Jubal declaimed in sign language, 'wait and gather information. Why have they come? What are they after? When we know the answers to these questions we can strike more effectively.'

So we spied on the cubist horrors as Earth existed under alien rule, watched the zombies—the music now totally controlled all human emotion—put to mining salt. We didn't believe it for a long time, but all our spies agreed. The aliens were mining salt, compressing it, shipping it out.

We stared at each other in amazement. Ordinary common salt.

Jubal's fingers blurred in motion. 'It doesn't matter why—perhaps it's a drug to them. Perhaps it's rare where they come from. We shall probably never know. But it's salt they're after, so that is where we must strike.'

It appeared from our reconnaissance that the aliens were denuding Earth of its salt at a tremendous rate and with appalling rapacity.

'This is a serious matter for us,' Jubal signalled. 'Salt is necessary for human life—without it our race becomes extinct.'

When a medical man confirmed this, we began to make underground caches; while the star-beings mined from the land and extracted from the sea, processing in their zombie-manned factories.

We staged an attack on the nearest factory—and reprisal was vicious, out of all proportion. Obviously salt, to the Musicians, was a crusade. Now they took us seriously and hunted us down remorselessly. We found they had yet another weapon in their armoury; a killing weapon this time. An instrument that broadcast sonic agitation violent enough to destroy living tissue. They were no longer interested in converting the rebels to willing slaves; this was a war of extermination.

Though they still trapped a few of us when it suited them. Operated on, a pellet buried in the skull, the prisoners had little choice. It was obey or be driven insane. Their orders were to betray the cell they belonged to. A few took their lives, but not all.

Carmen was with me on our last raid. We carried plastic explosive in panniers, enough to put one factory out of action. It was a small factory on the outskirts of a town and we moved in after dusk. A night shift was operating, with zombie workers and Musicians on watch.

I was happy in those days, happy with Carmen, happy to fight back at the invaders. I still had the illusion of resistance to sustain me—and then, catastrophe.

A zombie betrayed us.

We were traversing open ground when the sonic boom caught us. Jubal was killed outright, Carmen, on the fringe, went down. I tried to reach her, but it was hopeless. From a distance, I watched them fit their skull attachment and knew she no longer belonged to me; and I turned away, sick and soured, hating the aliens, hating...

I went underground alone, and stayed a long time. Longer than I intended. When I went topside again, there were no free men in my area. They had all been trapped or killed.

Alone and lonely I explored further, still finding none of my kind. I was scared now; the rebellion had been broken. Once they spotted me and started a hunt, but I eluded them.

I am the last I know of, out of touch. I hide, and wait.

Back again. I just sneaked up to spy on things. They're well down now, and still digging. They must be very sure I'm here. The surrounding area swarms with zombies so it's no use trying one of the escape tunnels. I'm trapped.

There must be others somewhere, unknown to me, who will find this record later. I try not to worry as I wait for the end. I am too depressed to worry, because it was Carmen who finally betrayed me...

Still, there is this one slim hope. In space, on man-made satellites, at the Moon base—isolated by a vacuum through which no sound can pierce—free men exist.

While I am a mouse in a hole with nothing left to live for.

One day the aliens will leave. They will leave when Earth is stripped of her salt deposits. And then must come a Renaissance. Men will start again, lick their wounds and look at the stars with new insight. We know now there are enemies out there. We shall not be so easily defeated a second—

## Readers' Reaction

Phil High emerged as the winner in our fourth issue, as determined by reader response, and wins our bonus of £10. The reader whose votes most nearly tallied with the final result was David Ward, of Ipswich. The four most popular stories were:

1. PSYCHO-LAND by Philip E. High.
2. PRIME ORDER by Peter Cave.
3. TROJAN HORSE by E. C. Tubbs.
4. BREEDING GROUND by Christopher Priest.

### Coming next issue . . .

#### ECHOES OF ARMAGEDDON

by Lee Harding

#### NOTHING LIKE THE SUN

by Christopher Priest

plus other great stories and features.

Order from your newsagent or direct from this magazine.



# Frank Bryning ELECTION

His jet was waiting on the tarmac when Johnson was called back to Administrator Wilkie's office. He turned into one of the streets which radiated from the Administration Block.

'Have a good trip, Johnno!' It was Gilbert Stacey at the door of Space Flight Tolerance and Conditioning.

Johnson acknowledged with a smile. 'Don't you let any get by not fit to fly!'

Stacey gestured rudely at the standard gibe at his department. As Johnson approached Administration, long, low pavilions fronted the street-wide thoroughfare on either side: Aptitudes—Psychological—Investigation of Trade Proficiency and Refresher Training—Secondary and Tertiary Trades Training—Assimilation of Mars/Venus Indigenous Foods—Colonial Ecology—and all the rest, from Initial Medical to Pre-Flight Quarantine.

On four sides of Administration Block extended the establishments of Interplanetary Colonies Recruitment and Selection, the most elaborate and expensive emigration machinery ever known, a satellite town near Woomera. It functioned to make sure that the original breeding stock—human, animal, vegetable—for the colonies on Mars and Venus would be biologically sound, most likely to survive, and free from disease.

Huge and complex, the recruitment institution was a costly operation. Yet within the economics of transporting people anywhere by space vessel, and sustaining them there until they became self-supporting, it achieved great savings. Otherwise, against the costs of space transport and colony sustenance, losses through square pegs failing to fit round holes could be prohibitive.

Wilkie waved a hand toward the chair by his desk.

'Just learned you are going up Arnhem Land way, Johnno. Wondered if you could fit in a little call for me.'

'You're the boss,' Johnson shrugged. 'You authorise it—I do it.'

'It'll mean a detour across the Gulf of Carpentaria on your way back—perhaps another day on the trip. But I think it worth while. We might learn something to save quite a lot of work here. And reduce costs. It might reduce further our already small but none-the-less expensive percentage of misfits.'

'Where—?'

'Matalinga—where we recruit a number of young people from Northern Territory, the Gulf Country, New Guinea, and the Islands.'

'And what might we learn there that our lavishly equipped laboratories here can't tell us?'

'How a can who runs an outback general store *cum* Post Office *cum* Commonwealth Bank, *cum* petrol service station, *cum* half a dozen other things, can send us better than ninety per cent correct selections as to suitability of applicant for Mars or Venus.'

'Correct by what standards?'

'By our own final assessment of a candidate's biological and temperamental suitability for Mars on the one hand or Venus on the other, based on all the precise measurements and tests our laboratories have devised!'

'So what? It all boils down to a choice between two destinations—Mars or Venus. Guesswork alone would come up with about fifty per cent of correct answers—'

'Yes. But this chap beats that by a long way. He does much better than our average from all sources other than our specialists here.'

'What is the "all sources" average?'

'Sixty-seven per cent. Our Matalinga man gets ninety-two per cent correct!'

'Consistently?'

Wilkie nodded. 'Plus or minus two or three per cent.'

'Twenty-five per cent better,' murmured Johnson. 'That is significant.'

'As you know,' continued Wilkie, 'we have to reject about seventy per cent of all candidates because of some medical defect, poor tolerance to extremes of temperature, humidity, pressure, acceleration stresses, *et cetera*—or because of orientation difficulties in nil gravity, co-ordination lapses in low gravity, in low oxygen supply, and so on.'

'And of the remaining thirty per cent who do qualify, you say, about sixty-seven per cent of tests agree with the original elections?'

'Yes. Yet Evans—that's our Matalinga man's name—gets ninety-two per cent right. Somehow he can sum up the essentials and recognise the appropriate types. Or else he gets the idea over to 'em in such a way that they really know enough to make their own best election. How he does it—that's what we want you to find out.'

Evans' answer, at Matalinga, when Johnson bluntly put the question to him, was equally blunt.

'They tell me themselves.'

'They tell you. How do they work it out?'

'They answer my questions—and I put down the result.'

'Good! Just what questions do you ask?'

But Johnson went unheard. A customer had come into the filling station.

Evans was still at the pump when a dark-haired youth came to the Post Office counter. Johnson, browsing at the magazine stand, watched him take up a Planetary Colonies pamphlet.

Coming back behind the counter Evans sized up the situation.

'Want to go out to the planets,' he said. It was not a question—simply a verification of what he observed. He picked up a pen and dipped it in the ink at the same time as he drew an application form from the rack.

'Name?'

'Jack Benson.'

'Benson,' repeated Evans as he wrote. 'Jack or John?'

'John.'

'Got a second name?'

'I don't use it.'

'Got to have it, now or later.'

'Dudley,' confessed the youth, with a grimace.

'Nothing wrong with that. Who you named after?'

'Father. He died—'

'Was he a good bloke?'

'I'll say he was.'

'Then y' sh'd be proud t'be called Dudley. Age?'

'Twenty.'

'Old enough t'know what you want,' commented Evans. 'Y'know, if y'go, it'll be for keeps?'

'I know. I've had all the dope for months. Read all the pamphlets long ago.'

So it went on, with Evans interpolating comments and writing laboriously. Johnson listened carefully to every word. No mention was made of Mars or Venus by the time Evans pushed the form across to be signed. Johnson could swear to that.

And now, in his gossipy way, Evans was right off the subject of recruitment, passing the time of day.

'Pretty warm today,' he remarked. 'Knocks me out. Can't take it like I used to.'

'Better than the cold,' said the lad, taking the pen.

'Must be pretty stinkin' up Port Moresby, where you come from.'

'You can get used to anything,' said the youth. 'But now I got itchy feet. Want to see—' he waved a hand—'out there...'

Evans' attention was now on two customers approaching the grocery counter.

'Y'll hear in about a fortnight,' he said. Weighting the signed form with the heavy inkwell he went at once to his grocery customers.

When the youth was well out of the shop Johnson left the magazine stand and went to the Post Office counter. He spun the form around with the inkwell still on it.

The space headed 'ELECTION OF PLANET PREFERRED (to be filled in by Enlisting Officer after preliminary discussion with Applicant)' was blank.

By a more or less devious route via greengrocery, filling station, hay and corn store, and hardware, Evans returned to the Post Office counter and picked out the self-addressed envelope for Planetary Colonisation.

He glanced over the newly filled-in application, turned it over and then back, dipped the pen in the ink, and without hesitation wrote 'Venus' as the planet of election.

Johnson blinked.



'There!' he said. 'How do you know that? You're only guessing—aren't you?'

'No fear! This is too important for guessing! It's got to be right. You know how much it costs to send someone to Mars or Venus, mister?'

'I've some idea. But how do you know what that boy's preference might be?'

'*Might be?* That's not good enough for this business! It's got to be what he "elects to prefer"—he, himself, not me. So I put down what he told me.'

'Like hell he told you!' Johnson challenged. 'I heard everything said while that form was being filled in. I'll swear neither you nor he mentioned Venus or Mars at any time. And you never asked him, either!'

'Didn't hafta,' replied Evans, blandly. He was not a bit put out by Johnson's rudeness. 'He told me before I ast him. I was just goin' t'pop the question, as usual, when he told me first.'

Johnson stared, brows knitted, striving to remember.

'Then I was interrupted—just like I am now. So I couldn't write it down...' Evans was looking out to the filling station. 'Be with y' Joel!' he called to the driver of the utility which had just pulled in.

Johnson winced.

'Tell me,' he said hastily. 'What question *do* you ask? What exact words...?'

But Evans was half-way out of the store already.

As he left his jet on the tarmac and headed for Wilkie's office, Johnson was grinning in high anticipation. As he passed Space Flight Tolerance, Aptitudes, Medical, Psychological, and the rest, he permitted himself a sardonic sneer.

Not that any of them could be dispensed with, really. No matter how close to a hundred per cent of their findings Evans' 'method' could come on the quite important matter of preference or suitability for one planet or the other, it would still be necessary to make the tests and physical examinations, and so on. These would still have to be matters of actual measurement under controlled conditions, of repeated and proven performances.

Yet what he had learned from Evans at Matalinga did suggest that there might be simpler and more direct ways of reaching conclusions without all the laboratory work.

After all, there were parallels in other fields. Dietetics, for example. Despite all the theory, despite all the calculations of calories, proteins, vitamins, trace elements, and so on, carried out to the *nth* degree, there were times when the doctors of medicine abandoned it all and relied on the patient's own appetites and inclinations to indicate his needs... And the pregnant woman's sudden and passionate hunger for delicacies such as bread and dripping, or kippered herrings in the middle of the night, was proverbial...

So he smiled maliciously across Wilkie's desk when they came to the point.

'I know how he does it, and I can do it equally well any time you like,' he offered. 'You can scrap your psychometrical and all that expensive equipment and sack all the experts. I'll do their work myself—for only half their total salaries...'

Wilkie was grinning.

'Here's my other leg. Have a pull at that—and then give me the low-down. How *does* our agent at Matalinga, untutored and busy Jack-of-all-trades as he is, reduce all our complex techniques to a simple formula?'

'Our agent at Matalinga can read,' said Johnson. 'He has read and he believes our literature describing conditions on Mars and on Venus. He has it summarised in his mind. So he asks every candidate one simple question and writes down the planet appropriate to the answer.'

'As easy as that!'

'It is. I can tell you now, with ninety-two per cent certainty, which planet you are best suited for if you will answer me that same question.'

'Ask!' said Wilkie. 'In the exact words of our recruiting agent at Matalinga.'

'You like it hot, Mr. Wilkie?' asked Johnson. 'Or you like it cold?'

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## TOPLESS IN UTOPIA!

Next month's episode of *THE IMPATIENT DREAMERS* by Walter Gillings reveals the bare facts behind the war-time booklets of Utopian Publications, whose pin-up covers disguised their science fiction contents! Don't miss this amusing and authoritative article in the July issue.

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• EDDIE JONES •

# SHADOWS OF FEAR

Eddy C. Bertin



***A gripping story of  
cosmic horror  
by a talented young  
Belgian writer***

The full moon spilled its cold light freely over the dead city, as the last man on earth carefully crossed one of the empty streets. The last man's name was Phillips. He had long since forgotten his name, and it didn't matter any more. He felt very old. He couldn't estimate how old; vaguely he remembered counting the days, with cut marks made on the walls of the buildings, but that was long ago. He had lost interest since then, as the Vval had gotten suspicious of the marks. His clothes were only rags now, and his beard was long, tangled and dirty. Washing was another forgotten luxury. The little hair he had left was dusty and grey. But old though he was, his eyes still burned with the mixed expressions of feveric hatred and fear.

He stayed in the shadows of the high empty-eyed buildings. It was a full-moon night, and the Vval were in the city. He shuddered, and continued on his way with the inaudible, sneaking steps of the hunted animal. He was lucky that the Vval weren't too bright. They knew that he was hiding somewhere in the dead city, the last living earth creature in the town whose population they had annihilated. And yet they were unable to hunt and catch him. Or maybe they just weren't interested enough and considered him as a beast in a zoo from which there was no escape, because the world was his cage. Or else they were just too damn lazy.

Phillips was chuckling inwardly. The Vval really were lazy, big, fat and stupid. He liked to believe that, wishing that he could spit into their faces: thick, fat, lazy swine! Only they had no faces.

The houses were looking at him, with their large black windowless eye-sockets and gaping mouths, dark holes in their battered walls. In a sense, the empty city had become a living womb-creature to him, a caring mother, a protecting friend. And he needed a friend in this world of lurking horrors.

When running from the Vval, the city had showed him its hiding places. It had procured resting places when he was tired and food when he was hungry. The friendly dead-alive city was his sole protector against the Vval.

Suddenly he stopped dead in his tracks, his breath halting in his throat. It was something he had learned very fast, after he had noticed their peculiar way of seeing: the Vval only noticed moving things. From the moment he became immobile, he lost all interest to them. He might as well have been just another piece of stone or wrecked metal.

The Vval passed by without giving Phillips a glance. It was about six feet tall, and like all the Vval, it had a weird staggering way of walking. Leaning on its two short legs with the three-toed feet, it dragged its long lean arms along, the claw-like hands scraping trails in the dust. The wind bulged the fleeces between the creature's arms and its body, blowing them up and behind as dark wings.

The small cylindrical head of the Vval was turning around, like a tank gun turret, the four lidless eyes, placed in one column above each other, supervising the

street for anything moving. Its black leathery skin was shining, fat and wet-looking in the cold moonlight. With dragging steps, the Vval passed through the street and disappeared around a corner.

Phillips left the shadows and started following the thing. It was a full moon. On such nights, the Vval would hold their sinister ceremony. Phillips had attended them all. This was the night of the month for the Vval, and also for Phillips. Carefully, he moved through the silent city. The silence was the worst of all, he thought. The loneliness itself would be bearable, if only some noise would disturb the all-encompassing dreadful silence. But the Vval made no noise, they were as silent as the night which had brought them.

As Phillips was crossing a moonlit square, one of the Zzol spotted him. Like a threatening shadow hawk, it fell out of what had been an empty black sky. Phillips saw it descending upon him, a black torpedo-shaped horror, with the big unblinking wet eye on its snout. He had a brief impression of the flapping bat wings and the outstretched long-nailed claws, before he threw himself away from the descending Zzol. It missed him completely, its claws and wings raising a dust cloud in their passing. The next moment, the Zzol crashed against the wall of one of the houses, its rubbery body rebounding. Stunned, it scrambled over the ground for a few seconds. Then it turned and rose back into the air, with a few stroke of its strong wings.

It saw Phillips, and came down, skimming the ground. As it spread its wings completely, its black belly opened. A mass of semi-vegetable slimy tentacles crawled out of it like a mass of wet seaweed, drops of digestive fluid glistening on them.

Phillips didn't know what the Zzol were exactly. They were partly bird and partly flying reptile, if they really could be described in terrestrial parallels. The Vval used them as a kind of free-flying domestic animal, watchdogs of the sky. They were much more dangerous than the Vval, deadly hunters who were responsible for the destruction of all animal life after the Vval came. But like their masters, they had an inborn stupidity, and Phillips knew their weak points. He evaded them as much as possible (his left side still bore the scars of one of his first encounters with the Zzol), but he knew how to fight them. He unfastened the stick from his belt, crouched down and waited. Suddenly the Zzol was upon him. In one quick movement he brought the stick crashing upwards into the creature's weak belly, and rolled away, evading the gripping tentacles. The Zzol leaped into the air, lost its balance and crashed into the dust, where it lay kicking.

Phillips ran away, wiping the stickiness from his weapon.

The Zzol was not dead—it seemed impossible to kill them—but it wouldn't rise again for over an hour. And by then, its small brain would have forgotten him.

Quite by accident, during his first fight with one of the Zzol, Phillips had discovered that their only weak place was the inside of their belly, which served as their

mouth and stomach at the same time.

Twenty minutes later, without further encounters, Phillips reached the clearing beyond which lay the Altar. He called it that, by lack of any other suitable name. Though he had seen it many times before, the cold shivers of anguish and stark horror reached back into his stomach, just like the first time.

The Altar was composed of monolithic buildings constructed against and upon each other. A colossal stone city, forming by its alien structure an enormous stairway to the top of the Altar. In the stones were rectangular openings, and often Phillips had seen the Vval come in and out of them on their strange alien tasks. Structurally, the 'building' was an impossibility; Phillips could not guess how the Vval had constructed it. Maybe they had some way to negate gravity.

In a large circular space around the Altar, the Vval had destroyed every human building, surrounding their monolith city with a black-burned plain. Above the Altar, the full moon was shining, cold and sinister. The eye of an alien god, Phillips thought, and shuddered.

He crouched in the shadows, waiting. The Vval were already starting to come towards the Altar; he had been lucky to encounter only one on his way. First, the shadows came. They came out of space, or out of some nameless unknown dimension of terror. Phillips didn't fear them, they couldn't touch him. They were just shadows, enormous vague forms who fell down upon earth and the city on the nights of full moon. They came and went, sometimes cutting sharply across the sky, sometimes just the vaguest impression of movement. Dark winged monstrosities, only partly material. And after the shadows, the Vval came out of their subterranean hiding places. They hated the sunlight, and only started appearing after the sunset, as darkness fell. Big, fat beastly things, whose footsteps awoke no one any more in the empty city. They came, alone or in small groups. They made no noise, other than their feet moving the dust. Once more, Phillips wondered where they were by day. He had searched for their hiding places, or for the entrances to their cellars with the slight hope of destroying some of them. So far, he'd been unable to uncover anything.

The Zzol also were collecting around the Altar. From time to time, their swarms eclipsed the moon. At first, Phillips had thought them to be ordinary big-sized bats when they were flying high. But then he had spotted their forked tails, and sometimes the evil glitter of their single cyclopean eyes, and he knew them to be Zzol.

Silence. No sounds anywhere during the start of the ceremony. Now the Vval had arranged themselves in circles around the stone Altar. Above, the Zzol had formed one column, and were flying endlessly in the same bizarre circles. Phillips didn't know the sense of it, but he knew that their flight was forming alien mathematical formulae and designs in the air above the Altar.

A Vval approached the Altar. It was a colossus of twelve feet, Phillips estimated, and the only Vval with a different skin colour, a sickly greenish-blue tint. He was



climbing the monoliths now, using its claws as a bat crawling up a wall, slowly mounting to the upper roof of the Altar. There it raised its claws to the sky, stretching to its full length. The falling shadows from the sky were numerous now, and the Zzol started flying in violent insane patterns.

Time stopped. The Vval and the Zzol were frozen black drops in the sky, motionless in a world of stone. It was a brief moment of timelessness, of utter silence.

Then the moon turned red, as if an enormous mass of blood had started running across its face.

Time restarted. The Vval began to move, his long arms forming bizarre designs in empty air, his wings bulging behind him, flapping in the wind. His body slowly started rocking to an unnatural rhythm, in complete harmony with the movements the Zzol made above him.

His movements were transmitted to the Vval below. Slowly they began moving their leathery bodies to the same unearthly rhythm of the upper Vval, faster and faster. Soft red burning clouds began drifting down from nowhere, a throbbing glow without real fire. The Altar took an unnatural red colour, then slowly became transparent, and Phillips saw the outlines of the enormous gelatine brainlike Thing which was inside it.

The most horrible part was the silence, Phillips thought again. Somehow it would seem less alien, if they only would make some noise, but now it was just moving, moving, faster and faster to that insane rhythm he could not hear.

Then the earth under the monolith Altar started glowing; a soft greenish tint, which began spreading across the burned plain, then mounted the Altar itself, until it all was one throbbing green-glowing thing; the colour waxed and waned, as if from some unearthly heartbeat. The Upper Vval seemed a towering colossus. It sank to its knees, arms spread into a posture of supreme worship.

Something began to exist in the empty spaces between the throbbing Altar and the bloodied moon; something which was the red of Hell, and the green of eternal evil. Something which was at first a shadow, slowly materialising into the world, something which Phillips sensed was the ultimate horror.

He didn't want to see the face, if the nameless Thing had a face at all. Now was the time to run, which was what Phillips did. For the Vval and the Zzol there would come now an hour of ecstasy, of wild dancing and horrible worship of the Being they had called from beyond. This was the time of their monthly feeding.

He sneaked into the small white building, where the Vval kept their food of the gods. He took away as much as he could carry in his arms and in his clothes. He used the sharp piece of metal he always had with him to chop off as many large pieces of food as he was able to.

He went to the lost ground, as he had christened it, which was not far from the white building. There he settled down to eat, using his fingers and his self-made knife. The food of the gods, he had called it, and it was

delicious, some parts rather dry and fibry, but others soft and with an incomparable flavour.

While he was eating, he used to think about the Vval, never able to come to a real conclusion. He had searched long for other survivors after that night of horror, when the shadows suddenly fell over the city. But they had killed everyone; he still didn't know how he had escaped. Maybe he was immune to what they had used to annihilate humanity. Probably he would never know. And immediately after the shadows, the Vval and Zzol came. Maybe they had always been there, Phillips thought. Always around us, unsuspected, waiting for their chance.

Stop thinking, a voice whispered in his mind. Stop thinking about it now. He had a vague sense of something menacing, dangerous. He wanted to think about it. But the whispering voice inside his brain kept on trying to stop him. Don't think about it. DON'T.

How long was it since the Vval came? How long could it have been? He tried to remember how many marks he had made on the walls ... before what? What walls?

**STOP THINKING ABOUT IT, THE VOICE URGED, WARNED HIM. STOP NOW!**

There were strange empty places in his memory, which age alone couldn't be responsible for. He frowned, trying to remember.

And the barriers in his brain went down, complete memory drowning his mind in its horrible reality. He was alone, sitting on an upturned stone in a cemetery, and he knew that he was ALONE, COMPLETELY ALONE. He knew that there was nothing except him, no Vval, no Zzol, no shadows except his own. The world was empty except himself. With unsettling clarity, he knew that it had been only a few weeks, and that the only beard he had was from not shaving during that time. He knew that he was the only survivor from the plague of the Green Death.

He knew the stones of the cemetery, and he knew what he was eating now, not food of the gods, but the remains of something which had never been buried because there was no one left to do it.

He knew the Vval for what they were, a nightmare world he had created himself to escape reality. Because all the shadows of fear were less horrible than this lonely reality.

But it couldn't be true, his mind rebelled! I am having hallucinations now, I have been too near to the Altar. I have lived for years running from the Vval. I am eating their food, I have seen their ceremonies, and they have been on earth for years!

He brought his hands up, and felt his beard. When he looked up beyond the white building, he saw the glow from the ceremony of the Vval. And he knew with dead certainty that this WAS reality. What other reality COULD there be?

He smiled at his own stupidity, and took a good bite from what he had in his hands. The food of the Vval was delicious ...!

# A MATTER OF SURVIVAL

by E.C. TUBB



It is obviously impossible for anyone to know who is making the call from the mere sound of the telephone, but, impossible or not, General Erwin Rasch flinched as his desk phone gave its muted buzz. Sighing he reached for the receiver. Sighing he listened to the all too-familiar voice echoing stridently in his ear.

'Yes, dear,' he murmured. 'No, dear, I won't forget. Yes, dear. Yes, dear. Yes ...'

Across the room Captain John Carmody bent very low over his desk suddenly intent on the papers spread before him. At his side Lieutenant Wilson, young, brash and careless, whispered from the corner of his mouth.

'Listen to him! Nature's own yes-man!'

'Shut up!'

'I swear he hasn't a soul to call his own. God save me from marriage if that's what it does to a man!'

'You crazy fool!' Carmody was in agony. 'Pipe down!'

The captain had reason to be afraid. With a spending budget larger than a major city, with more men and material under his command than any small-time dictator, the General could wield an axe with a devastation equal to any medieval monarch. And, if the devastation was not quite as bloody the distinction was slight. A man can only lose one career.

'Have you ever seen her?' Wilson seemed hell-bent on committing careericide. 'A battleaxe if there ever was one. He must have been crazy to have hooked his wagon to a dragon like that.'

It was too much. Carmody rose, not knowing quite what he intended doing but knowing that anything was safer than listening to that dangerous whisper. The General had two ears, only one of which was occupied, and he didn't trust the office acoustics.

He was drawing a cup of water from the cooler when the General softly replaced the receiver.

'Carmody!'

He turned, half the water jumping from the paper cup in his hand.

'Yes, General?'

'That was my wife.' Rasch drew a deep breath. 'She called to say that she's arranged a little cocktail party for this afternoon. About a hundred guests.'

'That should be nice, sir.'

'Nice!' The General snorted. Almost too late Carmody remembered that Rasch hated cocktail parties and other assorted social get-togethers. Quickly he redeemed himself.

'It's a pity that you won't be able to attend, sir.' He twisted his face into an ingratiating smile. The General looked sharply at his aide.

'What do you mean?'

'Professor Michelin is due this afternoon, sir. You remember, the sociological expert from Westerham High. You called him in to discuss ...'

'He won't be able to make it,' interrupted Wilson. 'He's sprained an ankle or something and begged to be excused.'

Wilson, thought Carmody grimly, wasn't going to get very far.

'Michelin,' mused Rasch thoughtfully. 'He was going to advise on the selection of personnel for the project, right?'

'That's correct, General,' said Carmody. 'Shall I make another appointment?'

'I don't think so,' Rasch looked up at the ceiling. He hadn't been married for thirty-five years without having learned to recognise an opportunity when he saw it. 'The President is very eager to see the project off the ground. I don't think that, at this stage, we can afford to waste time. Westerham High, you said?'

'That's right, General.'

'A three-hour drive,' mused Rasch. He straightened, the sagging lines of his face firm with sudden resolve.

'The Project must come first,' he announced. 'The wishes of the President must be followed no matter at what personal inconvenience. I will visit the Professor myself.'

'I understand, General.'

'I hope that you do, Captain. Call my car and then in, say, an hour's time, notify my wife that I've been called away on unavoidable Government business.'

The business was sixty-five, with a mane of white hair, a thin, lined face and a pair of remarkably shrewd blue eyes. It sat in an old-fashioned chair with one leg resting on a low stool. A chessboard stood on a coffee table to one side and smoke rose from a scarred brier, the scent of tobacco mingling with the dry, musty odour of old books.

'General Rasch!' Michelin extended a hand as his visitor entered the room. 'This is an unexpected pleasure!'

Rasch shook the proffered hand and stared at the chaos of the professor's study. Michelin shrugged.

'It suits me this way,' he said simply. 'My housekeeper and I have come to an agreement—she takes care of the rest of the house and leaves this room alone.' He gave a rasping chuckle. 'She's an odd woman,' he said. 'With three husbands dead behind her she wages continual war on all confirmed bachelors—but she makes excellent coffee. Would you like some?'

Without waiting for an answer Michelin pressed a buzzer.

'Coffee,' he ordered when his housekeeper thrust her head into the room. 'Hot, strong and plenty of it.'

'There's no need to bother ...' began the General. Michelin waved him to silence.

'I want some,' he said calmly, 'and she's paid to do as I want.' He gave his rasping chuckle again. 'Within reason, naturally.' He poked at the bowl of his pipe. 'Your wife called,' he said casually. 'About two hours ago. She wants you to ring her right away.'

The General sighed.

'There's an extension in the hall,' said Michelin.

The coffee arrived while the General was on the phone. When he returned he took the cup Michelin proffered, sat down in an overstuffed chair, sipped, looked surprised and drank half the contents at a gulp.

'Rum,' said the professor. 'I take it that you are a drinking man, General?'

'I used to be,' Rasch emptied his cup. 'But my wife didn't like it. Ulcers, you know—well, she doesn't think I should.'

'I understand.' Deftly Michelin refilled the empty cup with the mixture as before. 'The wonderful care wives take of their husbands is a joy to consider. But the taking of a little alcohol is, I feel, warranted in certain situations. Your health, General!'

They drank and Rasch relaxed, thinking that the professor was a very understanding man. He was also, appearances notwithstanding, considered to be the foremost expert in the field of human behaviour in the western world. The only logical man to advise on the all-important problem of selecting personnel for the Project of which Rasch was responsible.

'We're behind schedule,' said Rasch when the coffee had been cleared away and they'd gotten down to business. 'The ships are ready, the logistics taken care of and we're all ready to go as soon as we solve the final problem.'

'The personnel?'

'Exactly. With the new drive we can crack the faster-than-light barrier and step outside of our own backyard. But there's a snag. The Neeld Drive has built-in limitations. Twice the ship means four times the engine, which means a bigger ship to hold the bigger engine, and then a bigger engine to move the bigger ship. There's an upper limit beyond which it is both uneconomic and impracticable to go.'

'And that, of course, limits your personnel.'

'Yes. We'll crack the problem later, naturally, but we're up against time. UNO has agreed that new planets will belong to those nations who first land and grow an edible crop on them. That means we've got to stay on a new world at least six months. If we do then it's ours. Technically it should be a cinch but...'

'...but in the final essence the Project is only going to be as good as the personnel.' Michelin nodded. 'If they fight, get carfed, the sulks or just plain multheadedness, fall sick or quarrel about the division of labour...' He shrugged.

'Blooie goes a brand new world,' said Rasch grimly. 'We lose it and they get it. That means in the future we'll have just that less power to argue with if it comes to arguing. Damn it, Michelin, we could even wind up a minority!'

The possibility, to any right-thinking man, was too horrible to contemplate.

'So that's why you've come to me,' said Michelin. Rasch nodded.

'We've got to cover every angle,' he said. 'Naturally we on the Project have ideas of our own. Certain basics are obvious. The team must be intensely loyal to each other and yet this loyalty must not interfere with harmony. I mean, it's no good having a class of personalities, loyalty in that case could defeat its own object. Then again we have to try and find a happy medium

between selflessness and selfishness. It could so happen that one member of the team gets into difficulties. In that case he might have to be sacrificed for the common good... you can appreciate the problem?'

'Indeed I can.'

'Good. Can you solve it?'

'I'm not sure.' Michelin looked thoughtfully at his injured ankle. 'I take it that the smallest operating party is the most desirable?'

'Yes.' Rasch fumbled for cigarettes. 'We know that it must be larger than two. We...'

'How do you know that?' asked Michelin sharply.

'That the party must be larger than two persons?' Rasch looked surprised. 'Psychologists have proved that the conflict of personalities between two people in isolation inevitably lead to emotion, friction and tension which can result in acts of violence up to and including murder. Why do you ask?'

'Just checking on your basic research,' said Michelin from behind a cloud of smoke. 'Please continue.'

'Three people are better but then we have to face the possibility that one may die and leave the undesirable pair. Four is safer, but a group of four contains within itself the danger of equal division and so to the basic undesirability of the pair. Five... well, five seems to be the minimum number. Large enough to prevent close-contact friction, large enough to prevent equal division, large enough for optimum survival potential. You agree?'

Michelin grunted.

'The next obvious step is the actual selection and training of the personnel,' continued Rasch. 'Physically tough and yet with a strong sympathy. Selfish in that the colony must be of prime importance and yet self-sacrificing should the need arise. Strong and yet merciful, hard and yet gentle, dedicated and yet able to assess the local situation in its own terms.' He paused. 'It isn't too easy.'

'I can imagine,' said Michelin drily. 'I would have said that to find such men was impossible.' He lifted his hand to halt Rasch's protest.

'Let's be logical,' he said. 'Let's imagine a situation which could quite easily happen. You have picked your team and two of them are out on a survey. One falls and breaks his leg. Now what does the other do? He has two alternatives. He can help his team-mate or he can look after himself. Complicate things a little. If he helps his team-mate then neither of them are going to get back. Are you with me?'

Rasch nodded.

'You have picked your men to be tough, selfish and strong on self-preservation. So the uninjured man leaves the other to die while he heads for safety. But you have also tried to pick men with gentleness and sympathy, men filled with the desire to help others. So the uninjured man stays and they both die. Which way do you want it?'

'Well, I...'



'You can't have both,' snapped Michelin. 'In nature there is only one measure of strength. The strong survive. Only the strong survive.'

Rasch grunted, opened his mouth then closed it as Michelin continued.

'Let's look at another situation. Five men are on one of your worlds. The crops are doing well. Water is available in small quantities—and then there is a drought. One man can survive together with the crops. If all try to survive the crops will fail. You know what would happen then?'

'I can guess,' said Rasch. 'Don't think we haven't studied the problem, Professor.'

'Murder,' said Michelin with relish. 'Those five men would splinter into five groups each intent on looking after its own skin. The crops could go to hell and you'd lose men and planet both. You can't expect a man to be a tough, fighting animal one day and a meek, self-sacrificing creature the next.' He made a gesture. 'Send one man only.'

'Impossible. One man could die, fall ill, a hundred things. I told you we've studied the problem. That's why I'm here. We can't find the answer. Can you?'

'Of course,' said Michelin. 'When we have discussed the matter of my remuneration.'

It surprised Rasch. It knocked him a little off-balance and he said so. He was disgusted that any loyal patriot would even think in terms of self when his government so desperately needed his skill and knowledge. It should be an honour to serve and that service should be its own reward. Michelin's response was to relight his pipe.

'Calm down, General,' he said. 'Incidentally, how much do you get paid a year?'

'What has that got to do with it?'

'According to you the honour of wearing that uniform should be recompense enough. But you like to eat and smoke and maybe throw a few parties, eh, General? And your wife, doesn't she like a little spending money? Well, so do I. Now let's act like grown-ups and make a deal. If you agree to pay me what I asked for in my last letter to you I'll help you out. If not—' Michelin shrugged.

'All right,' Rasch surrendered. After all, it wasn't his money. 'Now tell me. What is the optimum team we should send out in the ships?'

'Two people.'

'Two? But the psychologists ...'

'... talk more often than not out of the backs of their necks,' Michelin jabbed the stem of his pipe as if he were holding a sword. 'Two people, General, is the basic unit of humanity. Two. Not three or four or five, but two. One man and one woman. Two people.'

'But—?'

'Married, of course' said Michelin dreamily. 'They have to be married and the longer the better. If the woman is expecting a blessed event then that's all to the good. A man will make a fool of himself for a wife who is expecting. He does it all the time.'

'You're joking,' Rasch jerked to his feet, storm-clouds gathering in his eyes. 'Listen, Michelin, I didn't come all this way to be made a fool of, I came as a Government representative, seeking advice. I ...'

'You got advice,' snapped Michelin. 'You asked for it and you got it. A married couple have between them every desirable characteristic you can imagine for what you intend. Self-preservation, self-sacrifice, all the rest of it. You doubt that? Then who the hell do you think beat a civilisation out of the wilderness? A gang of bachelor hunters? Not on your life. It was the little woman wanting a warm cave and who was tired of all the moving about who drove her mate to quit playing and start working. And the poor devil hasn't stopped since.'

'You're a cynic.'

'I'm a bachelor,' corrected Michelin. 'The outsider sees most of the game, remember. But don't imagine that I hate women, on the contrary, I've the greatest admiration for them. The way they get things done—!'

He smiled and shook his head.

'Well, General, there it is. Too obvious for your own staff but it's the answer you're looking for. Send a couple out in each of your ships and pretty soon we'll own the universe.'

'I don't know,' protested Rasch. 'I just don't know.'

'You should.'

'What—?' Rasch broke off as the housekeeper stuck her head into the room.

'General Rasch,' she said. 'Mrs. Rasch on the line, sir. She wants you right away.'

'Hell,' said the General. 'Hell!' He looked at Michelin. 'All right,' he said. 'We'll try it your way. But God help the poor guys we send out!'

Wearily he trudged towards the phone.

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# PROBLEM CHILD

## PETER OLDALE



The first occasion was when Mrs. Roberts was getting Rosie a fresh nappy ready. The job was delaying a game that they had been playing with teaspoons on the kitchen table, and Rosie was annoyed. She cried and later shrieked in frustration and then Mrs. Roberts saw one of the spoons slide across the table top into Rosie's hand.

Apart from a startled glance and a quick look under the table, where she thought Buster, their dog, might have rubbed against the legs, she thought and did nothing about the moving spoon.

A week later, when Rosie's food was delayed by a parcel being delivered, Mrs. Roberts was returning to pick up the already filled bottle when it moved firmly away from her hand towards the yelling baby.

There was simply no mistake this time, though it was true that Rosie had been bouncing about, enough perhaps to shake the bottle a little. But not enough to move it.

That evening, Mrs. Roberts told George, her husband. She had anticipated correctly his reactions.

'You're imagining things again, Shirley,' he snapped

irritably. 'You and your mothercare books. What the kid wants is less "psychology" and a bit more ordinary affection.'

Mrs. Roberts flushed angrily.

'Just because you give Rosie everything she cries for. *Anything* for peace and quiet, that's you!'

She said no more. It was just possible that the bottle had somehow slid with the vibration of her tread on the wooden kitchen floor. And the spoon moving could certainly have been Buster.

But the third time was more positive.

They were both, mother and baby, in their small living room. Mrs. Roberts was reading the daily paper in a chair by the fire. Rosie was inside her play pen absorbed with her toys.

After some minutes, Rosie started to yell, pointing out of the pen across the room. Unable to see what was wrong, Mrs. Roberts fussed and played with the baby, who continued to scream.

A small plastic doll had fallen out of the play pen and rolled out of sight under the sideboard. Rosie's cries

became even more fierce and hysterical as Mrs. Roberts tried to comfort her. Finally, Rosie gave a particularly violent shriek and held out both arms in the direction of the sideboard. As Mrs. Roberts turned to look that way, to see what was the matter, she saw the missing doll slide steadily though slowly out from under the sideboard, across the carpet, up to the play pen frame and, as she stared motionless with astonishment, the doll gave a heave and lifted *over* the frame and into Rosie's outstretched hand.

The next few minutes were crowded. With a swift smack Mrs. Roberts knocked the doll from her baby's hand, swept her into her arms and ran from the room. Once in the kitchen, she sat Rosie roughly in her high chair by the table.

She was not without courage. Crossing the room, avoiding the pen, she took the decorative pair of fire tongs from the hearth, then approached the doll. It took some time to grip this securely. Then she lifted it and carried it to the open fire. There, she dropped it amongst the glowing coals, where its plastic coating shrivelled and melted, curling unpleasantly, and exposing a wiry skeleton that slid down red hot into the grate. Hours later, after she had let the fire die right out, Mrs. Roberts found the wire remains and took them down the garden, which backed onto a garage, and flung them over the wall into a heap of wreckage.

The same day, she took Rosie to the doctor's surgery.

Dr. Paisley heard her out thoughtfully, eyeing professionally the slight tremor of her hands, the dry lips.

'Well, Mrs. Roberts, what you say is certainly remarkable. But you know, there may yet be natural explanations.'

'It did move, Doctor. I saw it. Across the carpet. The other times I wasn't sure, but this ...'

'But you say there was metal in the doll,' said Dr. Paisley reasonably. 'Now there's always magnetism you know. Queer things happen when there's electricity about.'

'Yes ... but we haven't got many electric things. Only the garage does have those welding things. Those that spark. Do you think they could have done it, Doctor?'

'Well, I'm no engineer, Mrs. Roberts, but it may well be so. And how are you yourself. Sleeping well? No dizziness or fainting? You look just a bit peaky.'

After a while, Dr. Paisley wrote out a prescription of a particular kind and saw Mrs. Roberts out.

It was three weeks before Dr. Paisley looked up to see Mrs. Roberts entering his surgery again, carrying a protesting Rosie. He mentally sighed, but motioned her to a chair. Over the increasing cries of the irritated Rosie, who was late for feeding and wanted her milk, which was already made up in her mother's basket, he listened.

'I waited for three times,' Mrs. Roberts burst out. 'I could see you never believed me, you're just like George and in any case she never does it when *he's* there because he lets her have everything she wants so she never gets into a temper and it's only then that she does it at all ...'

Between the broken streams of words and the yells of Rosie, Dr. Paisley gathered that more things had been 'moved' by Rosie when she was in a temper.

'So I came now, Doctor, so you could see, she's not had her milk and she's getting all worked up and you see, she'll do it like I said.'

Rosie's cries were certainly getting fiercer, and the noise was distracting. Paisley winced as the shrieks reached a higher pitch when Mrs. Roberts took out the bottle, but held it away from the baby. She tantalisingly waved it in the air, Rosie's red eyes following it as she yelled, tears of frustration running on the plump cheeks.

'Come on, baby,' Mrs. Roberts mouthed, sweat gleaming on her forehead. 'Get your milky ...'

Paisley frowned and half rose from his chair as Mrs. Roberts placed the bottle deliberately on a cabinet, just out of reach of Rosie, whose screams reached a crescendo of violence that he could hardly credit. Hysteria shone in the child's eyes and suddenly the doctor leaped up and took the bottle himself, passing it to the baby, who at once settled to satisfied sucking.

The silence was sudden and deafening. Standing, Paisley and Mrs. Roberts faced each other.

'Please sit down, Mrs. Roberts. I think we'd better have a little talk,' Paisley forced a soothing smile.

After a second of more or less silence, Mrs. Roberts collapsed on to the chair, and leaned heavily forwards over the doctor's desk. Her head lowered and she began to weep softly.

Paisley picked up the phone.

'Nurse? Would you come in, please. I'm going to examine Mrs. Roberts. And try to get Baxter from the General on the line.' For Baxter was a psychiatrist.

After two private sessions, Baxter was of the opinion that Mrs. Roberts would respond to treatment without entering hospital. Unlike Dr. Paisley, he had made no bones about his beliefs to his patient.

'Many of us see things that never happen, Mrs. Roberts. In fact, between you and me, I'd go so far as to say that *we all* do from time to time. You have been run down, and your mind has been playing tricks.'

'I do understand, Mr. Baxter. But why? I mean, why should I—imagine things like this about Rosie?'

'I frankly don't know, Mrs. Roberts. If I were to say I did, I'd be deceiving you. But *we shall* find out, if you will cooperate, and then we can put things right.'

'For the time being, avoid any situation where the baby gets frustrated. Keep her happy and satisfied, if you can. Obviously, these—appearances—have something to do with the baby crying. It affects all mothers, you know. I know you feel that your husband is *too* soft with Rosie, but for the time being, follow his example.'

In Baxter's letter to Dr. Paisley, he was less certain and cheerful.

'... and it is difficult to detect the real motive behind these attacks. The basic theme is that the child gets what it wants *without* the mother's help. This may be significant. Perhaps a concealed rejection symptom. I don't anticipate danger at this stage, especially since the

patient is so amenable to treatment. But I'd look in occasionally, if I were you. We don't want any... accidents...'

Five weeks of peace followed. Rosie found life considerably easier. Food and playthings were provided on demand, even *before* demand. Mrs. Roberts, at first on edge to prevent the outbursts that had started the whole thing, found that the easier path was not always so unpleasant.

Disaster came because of the cold weather.

A sharp nip caught Mrs. Roberts to light fires more frequently, and make them up larger. Coal ran short and she ordered more. The blaze had the usual fascination for Rosie that it has for all children, and with bigger fires, the flames became brighter, more desirable. Rosie crept to the fireguard and thrust her small arms through at the flames.

At once her mother drew her back, in spite of kicks.

'Burny, dear,' she said soothingly.

But the attraction of the fire was great, and Rosie, now unused to opposition at all, began to cry in earnest. She fought to escape her mother's imprisoning arms. Mrs. Roberts placed the baby beside the guard, but kept her hands firmly gripped.

'Pretty fire, but *burny*,' she cooed to the squirming Rosie. 'Mustn't touch!'

Rosie's face became suffused with dark pink as she wrestled to get her hands free. She started to shriek, dragged one hand from her mother's and thrust it through the guard. Mrs. Roberts snatched it back, grazing the soft skin on the metal. Rosie screamed louder and arched her back in a desperate struggle to be free. Rage glared from her small face. Mrs. Roberts held on firmly and at that moment the doorbell rang.

It was the coal delivery.

With due forethought, Mrs. Roberts hastily swung the child over into her play pen that stood in the middle of the room, well away from the fire.

'Mummy won't be long,' she said to the screaming child. 'You stop there just a minute. Then Mummy play.'

There were six bags of coal to be shot into the out-house, and the money to be found in the kitchen cupboard. As she went outside to the waiting man, Rosie's yells echoed ever louder.

The coal man grinned.

'Sounds as if you got trouble in there!'

'She wants to play with the fire,' said Mrs. Roberts. 'You know what they are.'

'All kids are the same,' agreed the man amiably. 'By God, though, she's got some lungs!'

And indeed, Rosie was excelling herself with piercing screams. Screams of a different, subtly altered, tone.

When Mrs. Roberts, followed by the curious coalman, ran into the living room this was full of smoke. In the play pen was a pile of flaming coals, and clinging screaming to the bars, Rosie tried to keep her legs up away from the flames. Her dress was smoking...

They took Mrs. Roberts away that afternoon, as soon as her husband could be found to take charge of the shocked but almost uninjured Rosie.

She went without resistance. In that smoky room the coalman had saved the baby. *She* had done nothing but stare and scream and stare again at the coals.

Dr. Paisley was able to deal with the police, and put them in touch with Baxter, who at once arranged for a bed in the General. By evening, Mrs. Roberts was under light sedation, and a conference had been held with Baxter, Paisley and George Roberts present.

'I knew she was nervy, of course,' Roberts was saying. 'But I never thought she'd harm the kid.'

'She *didn't*,' put in Baxter quickly. 'Notice how she arranges these things. There was a man actually there, at the time, and she positively encouraged him to come in to help. If she had intended real harm, she would have done it when nobody was about.'

'But why, Mr. Baxter? And whatever are we going to do now?'

'Have you anyone who could look after the child. Just for a week or two?' Baxter asked, frowning.

'Oh, yes. Our Frances. She always wanted kids of her own. She's got Rosie now. There's no problem.'

'Well, Mr. Roberts, let's leave it there, for the moment. I'm confident that this—trouble of your wife's is something temporary. I admit I never expected such... an unusual and dangerous demonstration as this with the fire. Let's see in a week's time.'

'Shall I bring the kid, Doctor? I mean, will she...'

'I should leave Rosie at home for a few days, Mr. Roberts. Then we'll see...'

It was three weeks before Rosie saw her mother again.

Not that they were days of unhappiness. Aunt Frances was easy going, kindly and had central heating. Moreover, she had bought large supplies of the small sweets that Rosie favoured.

But after three weeks Mrs. Roberts herself was becoming anxious. In her sedative-confused mind she became harrassed by fears that Rosie might, after all, have been burned in the fire and be being kept from her. Baxter felt that a meeting was necessary, and might be interesting. He authorised George Roberts to bring Rosie for half an hour, and arranged to be present.

The meeting was unexpectedly touching.

At first Rosie was too interested in the great white hospital building, the long, glittering corridors, the lift that swept her and Mr. Roberts up to the fifth floor, the white clad nurses and the small room with its sterile bed. She hardly noticed her mother.

But then, Mrs. Roberts raised herself and held out her hands. Rosie's face lit up and with a gurgle of delight she strained in her father's arms to try to reach the bed....

Baxter watched for ten minutes, then left, thoughtfully. There was no trace of the problem that he had



feared; rejection through fear of the mother by the child. Obviously, Rosie remembered her mother only with pleasure, the old frustrations forgotten, and the fire with its terrors.

He had Roberts called from the private room into the corridor.

'...not quite yet, Mr. Roberts, but fairly soon. It's obvious that Mrs. Roberts is much better. And Rosie seems quite—er—normal with her.'

Roberts nodded.

'I did wonder whether the kid'd remember, like. Be feared of her own mum. But she isn't and that's a fact.'

'All the same, Mr. Roberts, I'd like to take a few precautions. Perhaps your sister could stay with Mrs. Roberts a few days, after she comes home. Just until she settles in.'

'Easy, Mr. Baxter. Just as long as you say.'

They both re-entered the room, to see a happy Rosie trying to reach the glass apparatus that a smiling nurse was placing just out of her reach. A trace of a scowl crossed Rosie's face, but the sight of her mother once again distracted her.

'Time to go, Mrs. Roberts, I'm afraid,' smiled Baxter. 'But good news. Another week or so and I think it's home for you, for good!'

As her father lifted her from Mrs. Roberts' arms, Rosie began to wail. As Baxter, the nurse and Mr. Roberts paused in the doorway to smile farewell, the wail grew to a cry. As the room door closed the cry became a yell. Rosie squirmed in her father's grip and he smiled wryly at the nurse.

'She's a right handful when she gets mad.'

Rosie's screams became louder as they entered the lift and slid downwards. Tears of rage and frustration gathered in her eyes and ran down her soft, rounded cheeks. As Roberts crossed the wide, pale hall of the hospital entrance other visitors turned curiously to stare at the raging, shrieking baby, fighting in his arms.

He hastened out to his car, mercifully parked immediately outside below the tall white walls of the ward block.

As he fumbled awkwardly for his keys, clamping the baby beneath one arm, Rosie's suffused face turned upwards, staring desperately up at the vast rows of steel framed windows behind one of which her mother lay.

Rosie shrieked again, agonizingly, demanding, raising her free arms towards the high, motionless walls. Her eyes glared with effort.

From the fifth floor, about sixty feet above, came a crash of glass as a body smashed through a window.

Mrs. Roberts fell screaming, writhing, hurtling to the pavement. Her body swept Rosie from her father's arms and smashed her to the concrete.

George Roberts was uninjured, but mother and child were both dead on examination.

The window glass was supposed to be unbreakable, but it is common knowledge that insane people have unusual strength. There was no other explanation.

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# FANTASY REVIEW

## TIMES WITHOUT NUMBER

By John Brunner

Ace Books 81270. 156 pages. 60 cents.

*Reviewed by John Foyster*

Here's something which has been worked over rather ruthlessly. The first appearance in *Science Fiction Adventures* was followed by an earlier Ace edition (1962). The present text is described as 'completely revised and considerably expanded'. Was all this work necessary? Is the end-product worthwhile?

The only thing about the book which jars now is the division into three segments which makes the reader aware of the artificiality of his experience. This derives from the original publication, of course, and it may not be possible to weld the pieces together satisfactorily: this being the case we must endure the slight imperfections we have at present.

The theme of the alternative universe is not an easy one. It is difficult for an author to avoid heading off into the wildly romantic, or to lean towards what is generally speaking fairly heavy-handed satire. Mr. Brunner has avoided both of these pitfalls, and most of the others that can be imagined. The only possible area for quibbling concerns the absence of flight, but it is a small matter.

Mr. Brunner supposes the Spanish Armada to have been successful in 1588. The obvious consequence is a world dominated by Spain (and by the Confederacy of the East) and Mr. Brunner juggles this situation with considerable skill. The three sections of the novel follow the career of Don Miguel Navarro of the Society of Time: for, feeling that an alternative universe theme is not enough, the author has thrown in time travel (and in a particularly careful way). In fact it is probably more correct to say that Mr. Brunner has used the obvious link between these two main themes, though this link does not become obvious until the reader is about half-way through the book. It is

very nicely done.

The notion of time travel is dealt with simply in the first section, in which the problem of smuggling from the past is well-handled by protagonist and author, while in the second section some of the associated problems are dealt with at greater length. In the third section we revert to more straightforward adventure (though not without political machination) which winds up on a note which is sadly predictable. But again, it is very smoothly handled.

This is a quite admirable book and, for the best of reasons, hard to put down.

## LET THE FIRE FALL

By Kate Wilhelm

Herbert Jenkins. 223 pages. 22s. 6d.

*Reviewed by John Foyster*

This novel is labelled 'explosive'. As such it is a fizzer. But approached on a more serious, less advertising-copy level, it is a quite successful minor investigation of a not particularly unusual theme.

A spaceship lands on Earth. All but one of the passengers die, and that one is born on Earth. The boy has Super Powers. And so it goes on.

At this point the whole thing is up for grabs. One can do as one likes in this particular situation. The author, in this case, goes for social comment (I think). A not-very-admirable character gets The Call as a result of seeing the alien spaceship (and of hearing some frogs in a pond—had Bash but known?...) and decides to preach against the surviving alien (until he discovers that the alien (who he thinks is his natural son (are you confused by now? Good, this is apparently the author's intent)) has these super powers). Let's straighten out that who's who business: at the same time as the alien woman gives birth to a son one of Obie's paramours gives birth to a bastard and there is

a Confusion of Identity (later in the book—at the time there is no such suggestion). Who's Obie? Why, you can't have been keeping up with me—Obie is the Preacher. If all this seems rather confusing to you, just consider how difficult it is for the poor characters who do not share our semi-omniscient overview.

For in addition to shackling the plot (already uninspired) with some pretty heavy-handed satire (which is not unexpected if you recall that Kate Wilhelm equals Mrs. Damon Knight) the author has used characters of that dumb mid-Western sort which have too frequently threatened to become a backbone for 'folksy science fiction'. Surely if one wishes to make some point about the human race as a whole one must choose a reasonable facsimile thereof and not the first stick figure to come to hand.

All this is quite important, for inside this rather mediocre volume is a good story struggling to get out. The theme of confusion between human and alien in itself provides the basis for a book much longer than this, but has been treated almost as an aside. By contrast, bleating about religious quacks has become almost boring. Kate Wilhelm is too obviously skilled a writer to be allowed to shuffle off second-rate works of this kind without some kind of protest.

Protest aside, this can be a pretty enjoyable book. Provided one can become used to a superhero who reveals his powers as the plot requires, Blake Daniels is almost likeable. But one can't help but feel that Kate Wilhelm *could* have done so much better.

#### LIGHT A LAST CANDLE

By Vincent King. Rapp & Whiting, 219 pp. 28s.

*Reviewed by Geoffrey Giles*

A new English author is introduced by his publishers as one from whom we are certain to hear more. I echo the wish, but trust that Mr. King will not burn his candle at both ends on the strength of the blurb-writer's generous assessment of his first novel. To me, its 'rich concepts' seemed only just sufficient to sustain it; nor was the narrative so exciting that I couldn't put it down. The style, though perhaps appropriate to the subjective viewpoint, I found too spare to carry conviction where it was most needed. His penchant for the putrescent and for dark caverns, too, makes me suspect that King's candles might burn brighter in a gothic setting.

The story is set in a bleak future in which the outcast Free Men are planning a last, desperate attempt to overthrow the Aliens who have subjugated the rest. They have tilted the planet on its axis and shifted the polar ice to mine the ores beneath. They have also modified most of the inhabitants, who live in slavery with them down south of the Border in 'a sort of pink paradise.' Could be... for among the Mods are four-breasted women whose sole desire is to fulfil their function as Breeders.

Telling the tale is a loner from the Tundra who is more intent on ridding the world of the Aliens; though before he has accomplished his mission he has paused to sample what the cowardly new world has to offer. Having run the gauntlet of the Wardens who keep the rebels at bay, he and his fellow conspirators—including a resourceful wench who won't lie down under the yoke—get a surprise welcome in the hippy Happy Land beyond the Crystal Mountains. There they confront the sickening pink horror, something between a master computer and a synthetic monster, which rules the Alien roost, and with a few well-placed grenades reduce it to... but read it for yourself.

THE COMING OF THE SPACE AGE  
Compiled and Edited by Arthur C. Clarke  
Panther Science, 330 pp. 9s.

*Reviewed by Walter Gillings*

When I first set eyes on this appetising volume, I feared for a moment that my most successful protégé had written himself dry. Since he launched himself into print in *Tales of Wonder* in 1938, when he looked forward confidently to 'Man's Empire of Tomorrow', he has added thousands of readable pages to the literature of astronautics—a library of 'premature history' which he estimates must now run into four figures. When he took off, it comprised scarcely a dozen titles, only three of them in English.

Of the present volume of 'famous accounts of man's probing of the universe', the redoubtable editor has filled only nineteen pages with two pieces of his own—an act of self-abnegation which must rank among the most remarkable accomplishments. His early admirers—especially of his sense of fun—did not call him 'Ego' for nothing... And he has put himself among a most distinguished company, including the three national 'fathers' of astronautics whose autobiographies testify to their faith in an idea that, not so long ago, was universally rejected as so much science fiction.

Wernher von Braun recalls the days when the dream of his mentor, Hermann Oberth, began to materialise. A 1920 editorial from the *New York Times* commenting on Dr. Goddard's experiments clearly shows that it was the critics, not the 'cranks', who needed their heads examined. Nor has Clarke forgotten Phil Cleator, founder of the British Interplanetary Society, whose pen was filled with an acid as biting as any Fleet Street satirist's. Others who might have felt his sting had they been sensitive enough were the civil servants of Whitehall and 'the disingenuous Nature'. In the fullness of time, *Scoops* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* proved the more intelligent in anticipation.

Since Clarke always subscribed to the adulation which science fiction readers have accorded the man who chronicled the history of the next two thousand million years, Olaf Stapledon is represented in this book—twice. A section titled 'The Society of Space' includes a twenty-page abridgment of his lecture to the B.I.S. in 1948 on 'Interplanetary Man'—at which I, too, felt something like awe at being in the presence of 'one of the most civilised men of our time.'

But, to be fair, our editor also gives a double bow to the late C. S. Lewis, with whom he merrily crossed swords through the post. Now, he is rather more complimentary to his 'theological exercises' in science fiction than Sam Moskowitz, who attempts to prove that the creator of 'Perelandra' not only borrowed much of Stapledon's invention but 'an entire religious philosophy as it applied to the space age'—and the italics are his. For while Lewis admired Stapledon's fantasy he did not, obviously, approve his attitude, which put so much faith in man's own ability to 'revitalise the cosmos.' Yet, in an article in the *Christian Herald* in 1958, he embraced it with fervour, apparently.

To me, this comes as a revelation as intriguing as any of the surprising facts and attendant speculations which occur throughout this book. By drawing on the work of thirty-two other writers and reporters, Britain's tireless champion of astronautics has succeeded in his aim to provide amusement and inspiration as well as education, without putting too great a strain on his own creativity. Everything from

Amateur Rocketry to Extraterrestrial Linguistics, Space Commerce, and Direct Contact with the Stars is encompassed by his trawl. He even includes a sighting of flying saucers—by a noted amateur astronomer more used to spotting comets. But, of course, they turned out to be a flight of geese. In this sphere, even Clarke's imagination boggles.

If you've never seen a UFO you can't be very observant, in his estimation. 'I have encountered seven, and some were beauties. None were spaceships; nor were anyone else's,' he asserts flatly. So there.

But I still wonder what they were . . .

Walter Gillings

**THE FREAK SHOW** Edited by Peter Haining  
Rapp & Whiting Ltd. 256pp. 32s.

Reviewed by Don Malcolm

Some unoriginal wag is sure to look at Lawrence Edwards' jacket design for this book, and say, 'So that is what a science fiction writer looks like!'

If his curiosity is on a par with his humour, then he will leave the pages untorned and trudge to the decidedly unfresh woods of the conventional, where heads have bodies attached to them.

And he will be missing a superb anthology. I don't know any sf and fantasy writers who resemble the gentleman on the cover. But if more of them could write like the twenty authors here, it wouldn't matter what they looked like.

The illustration is just right. It grabs the reader by the scruff of his imagination and propels him into a world where the unusual is normal, and the normal is merely commonplace.



## STELLAR RADIANCE

A MUST for all readers of this magazine: the new Fine Art Reproduction from an original painting by the well-known astronomical artist DAVID A. HARDY.

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— Arthur C. Clarke

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Great care has gone into the compilation of **THE FREAK SHOW**. Writing, in all its aspects, is taken for granted by the general public. It all looks so easy. That 'easiness' is, of course, the mark of professionalism. And the more easy it seems, the more professional it is.

Many sf readers are possibly hazy about the very subtle difference between a collection and an anthology. The former, consisting of stories by the same author, has, if nothing else, the unifying bond of style, although the contents usually vary widely in theme and treatment. Collections cannot simply be thrown together, although I suppose that some of them are.

The anthology is another breed of cat. The editor starts with a basic theme. But he can't sit and comb the lists until he has the requisite number of stories, then consider his job done, any more than an engineer can dump a few girders and ties on site, then proceed to throw up his bridge.

He has to calculate stresses and tensions to ensure that the steelwork will do its job. In an anthology such as **THE FREAK SHOW**, the editor faced the same problem as the bridge-builder. He had to get his stresses and his tensions just right.

The choice of stories in an anthology is important. But their *juxtaposition* to each other within the book is paramount. This is the test of the editor's skill and judgment.

Peter Haining has been very successful. In his own way, he is a magician, and the compelling aura of the book communicated itself to me.

Make sure that you read this book from the beginning to the end, as the stories are printed. Resist the temptation

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to read first stories by your favourite authors, leaving the others to bring up the rear. A spell such as the one Haining has woven is very fragile.

So much for the anthologist and his problems. What about the stuff that spells are made of?

All twenty stories are top quality. The writing standard is high. However, a story can have all the necessary qualities and yet miss the mark. Some of the stories I didn't like, because their subjects didn't appeal to me, but that is purely personal. I am a lover of beautiful things and I don't care for dwarfs, giants, fleas or puppets. Despite that, I enjoyed two stories dealing with a dwarf and a flea, because they were so well written.

I can't mention all the stories that I did like. Condensed plot-summaries might be in order when the collected stories of a writer are under discussion and one is trying to discover his motives and philosophy, but they have no place here.

I'll select two stories that caught my fancy.

'The Gnarly Man', by L. Sprague de Camp, is one of the two longest in the book. In it, we meet Clarence Aloysius Gaffney, a 50,000 year old Irish caveman. While out hunting bison, he was struck by lightning, which did something to his medulla oblongata. 'I was thirty-three at the time...' says Clarence. (A ripe old age for a caveman, I would think.) 'I look older now, because the lines in your face are bound to get sort of set after a few thousand years...' Clarence is a walking history book. His anatomy and physiology are quite something, too. Haining calls the story a 'marvellous combination of Science Fantasy and Horror'. I must have missed the horror, for I found the story extremely amusing.

The Harry Harrison story, 'At Last, the True Story of Frankenstein', really is horrifying. There are no literary fireworks; the writing is handled with restraint that screws up the tension to the point where, almost, I felt I was the unfortunate Dan Bream. Definitely the cautionary tale for nosy parkers, this one!

The editor thinks that Bloch's story, 'The Girl From Mars' contains the best shudder in this collection'. I disagree, I think that Harrison's tale, with those by Mildred Clingerman and Russell, are better.

That brings me neatly to two minor niggles. In some of the introductory paragraphs to the stories, he is a wee bit too blatant in trying to form the reader's opinion for him. I like to make up my own mind about what I read.

On the contents page, story titles would have been sufficient, without additional remarks, many of which were superfluous, anyway. For example: Dwarf/THE DWARF.

A critic, praising a book by William Burroughs as the first serious work of science fiction, thought she was being clever by adding that all the rest were entertainment.

While not all the stories in the anthology are science fiction, they are vastly entertaining. And that is what storytelling is about, contrary to all claims about 'message' and so on.

One of the Behans summed it up crisply: when asked if his writings contained any messages, he replied, 'What do you think I am, a bloody postman?'

Climb aboard Haining's carousel and take a trip into the strange and the wonderful. All too soon you will find yourself back in the narrow cell of workaday life.

Don Malcolm

## THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

by Ursula K. LeGuin

Published by Macdonald at £1.50. 286 pages.

Reviewed by Kathryn Buckley

THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS is set on Gethen (or Winter as the other worlds know it) with a climate much colder than ours, approximating to a planet in a glacial period. It tells the story of the efforts of the Envoy of the Ekumen of Eighty-nine planets to wean Gethen out of planetary isolation and into communication and co-operation with the Ekumen.

The Envoy starts by approaching Karhide, one of the nations of Gethen, where he is viewed with fear and suspicion. Not unnaturally the inhabitants are unable to believe in a single sex creature from another world, for they are ambisexuals. Sex on Gethen is part of a 28-day cycle, analogous to rutting in animals, rather more delicately called 'kemmer', when an individual becomes sexually active and takes either a male or female role. Between times they are 'somer', sexually latent and neither male nor female—neutral but potentially either.

In many ways this is a very enjoyable book, written in a lucid, evocative language, which stands head and shoulders above the average science fiction novel. Particularly well done is the atmosphere of life on a cold inhospitable planet, which is very realistic. At times there are some very beautiful images.

However, there are some serious defects in the book. Obviously, Ursula LeGuin has attempted more than an ephemeral light entertainment novel. Accordingly, it is valid to apply deeper, but at the same time basic, criteria for an evaluation.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of this book is the author's failure to exploit the ambisexual idea, and the parallel idea that sex should be compartmented. Here was a chance to examine precisely how much sex influences our actions, how much the role each of us is cast in from birth—either male or female—influences us and how far the competitive element between the sexes is detrimental to civilised ambitions. Aside from stating that sexual competition and frustration are removed, that no one sector of the community has to be tied down to child-bearing and raising, we get no clear idea of the effects this would have.

On the one hand, it is implied that there is very little difference between the sexes, that too much emphasis is placed on the dissimilarities than on the similarities. On the other hand, by sweeping away the biological differences and with it the division in society, it is implied that this division rests solely on biological factors and is therefore fundamental and unchangeable, thus under-estimating the importance of culturally imposed differences. When it comes to the point the Envoy is unable to define the difference between a man and a woman, though this is not surprising since such a definition could well have labelled the author either a sentimentalist or a militant feminist. The hot potato of women's equality (or 'difference') is bedevilled by semantic confusion surrounding 'equal' as a qualitative or quantitative definition, i.e., equal meaning 'identical to' (I equals I) and equal meaning 'as good as' (I apple equals I orange).

Obliquely, Mrs. LeGuin seems to be saying that without sex in the way there would be no wars, only skirmishes, but that all life and no sex makes life a dull toll. Is this cold planet intended to symbolise a cold emotional life as we speak of frigidity meaning lack of passion?

One of the reasons why the character of the Gethenian people does not come over very clearly is the difficult method of viewpoint that Mrs. LeGuin has adopted. The two first person narrators are not differentiated sufficiently; both seem female. In the case of the Envoy, this is quite serious and indicates that the author has not distanced herself adequately from her character. This has emphatically nothing to do with the fact that this book is written by a woman; this merely makes the deficiency easier to spot. It must be pointed out that to write from the viewpoint of two first person narrators requires a high degree of technical skill, more especially since one is an alien.

THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS is liberally seasoned with the enigmatic inscrutable philosophy of the Orient, which has the virtue of sounding profound. A number of themes are worried at—nationalism, the paradox of Yin and Yang (which supplies the title) acceptance of the unknowable—but the scales are kept balanced, leaving the reader with no clearly defined created world of values and attitudes from which to draw his conclusions.

What these reservations add up to is a lack of vigour and verve. Nevertheless, it is a charming book with some delightful passages and the little myths of the planet could stand separately as very good fantasy short stories. There is plenty of material for discussion within its pages and this aspect alone satisfies one of the chief pleasures of reading science fiction.





# REBEL PLANET

BY PETER L. CAVE

## ONE

Even through the thick triple glazing of the clubroom bar windows, one could hear the muffled roar of yachts as they taxied along the runways.

Ket Fontaine downed his fifth double whisky and sauntered outside to hail a service vehicle.

'Hanger 24,' he muttered to the driver and settled back into the plush upholstery of the old-fashioned crater-creeper.

He over-tipped the driver as he got out—a sure sign that he was depressed. Ket was in a strange, unsettled mood. His heavy consumption of liquor over the past three days hadn't helped to lift the feeling of frustration which had been closing in on him steadily.

He had promised himself a weekend at the Lunar Space Yacht Club, and here he was. Usually, the environment of the club was enough to fill him with a sense of excitement. There was something about the feel of the pseudo-gravity, the smell of rocket exhaust fumes hanging in the thin atmosphere, and the thrill of blasting off from the launch pad into free space.

But this weekend was different, and Ket could feel it in his bones. The thrill was gone, the sense of excitement and expectancy long evaporated. No matter what he chose to do, Ket knew it had all been done before. There was no sense of adventure left anywhere.

Ket Fontaine was suffering from a disease common to rich young men of the 23rd Century. He was bored.

If only there was some danger left, or some new place to go, new sights to see. Even Space-yachting was no

longer dangerous—ground control could take over any stricken craft and bring it in safely on a grav-cushion. Ket had visited all the outwards several times over, had holidayed on the asteroid chain and was familiar with every known tourist spot in the galaxy.

He walked up to his yacht, gleaming magnificently in the harsh glare of the artificial daylight lamps. He looked at the smooth lines of the scarlet and chrome hull with no more than a flicker of interest.

Climbing into the control cabin, he lowered himself on to the padded flightcouch and automatically checked all his dials and gauges. Reaching out, he flipped the taxi controls and put through a take-off request to ground control.

The small green light blinked on, Ket pushed the firing button and the powerful motors whined into life—echoing in the confined space of the hangar.

Several heads turned as the craft floated down the runway to the blast-off cradle. There weren't many S-type yachts around, and they invariably caused envious looks and comments from owners of less expensive craft.

It was a ship which suited Ket's personality to a tee. Powerful, fast, slightly pretentious... an extrovert space craft for an extrovert person. The ship was unusual just as Ket Fontaine was unusual. He was a young rebel in an age of comfort and conformity when rebels had ceased to exist.

Ket settled back into the flightcouch. His body became fluid, mobile, moulded to the contours of the couch. It was important that he became part of the ship. When an S-type was really gunned, both craft and pilot had to be a perfectly complementing pair. To fly such a craft one had to be an enthusiast *and* a top-class pilot.

He eased the ship into position on the launching cradle and radioed ground control for blast-off clearance. The thin whine of the sirens reached him even through the double steel skin of the hull.

The cradle lifted, the nose of the ship pointed skyward and the entire area trembled as Ket built up power. Ket blasted off with the controls set at maximum.

As the yacht dwindled to toy size in the sky, two ground mechanics paused to exchange a few words.

'Powerful jobs, those S-types,' said one. 'The idiot flying her is in a hell of a hurry though.'

'Too damned powerful for a young tearaway like that,' reported his companion. 'Damned fool Fontaine, that was.'

'Nearly wrecked the cradle,' observed the first mechanic. 'He must be a maniac.'

'Anyone who calls his yacht "Sweet Suicide" must be a maniac of some description,' agreed his companion with finality.

Ket drew in his breath deeply as the G-force slipped away from his body. He had definitely blasted off too

hard. He reached gingerly forward and punched three small buttons on the control panel in quick succession. One of them cut the rockets back to orbital flight, the second slid the flight chart into view and the third opened the small panel locker.

Ket turned his attention to the latter. Pulling out the bottle of whiskey tucked away inside, he deftly uncorked it with his one free hand and took a hefty swig. This act alone could have lost him his licence for ten years.

He toyed with the flight chart irritably, and ran his eyes over the long list of co-ordinates. Of the hundred or so places he could transfer—almost immediately—the ship and himself, there was not one which appealed to him. Ket racked his brain. Where *could* he go? He mentally ticked off a few of the better possibilities. He could head for Altair V—there was some really good star-bathing at this time of the year. He could spend a weekend on Keltar, where fortunes were made and lost in the fabulous gambling casinos. There were the sleazy flesh pots of the asteroid chain... And of course, there was always Plebron. The frown on Ket's forehead lifted slightly. Yes, there was always Plebron. What was her name again, that little blonde belly-dancer he had met on his last trip? Sester, was it? The frown turned into an evil leer. There was something satisfyingly perverted about making love in a .53 gravity.

This thought occupied Ket for several minutes. Finally, with the slightest tinge of regret, he cast it away. Even that didn't really raise any real enthusiasm.

He snapped the flight chart away in disgust. What was he going to do? Whatever it was, he would have to do it quickly. He had been in orbital flight for nearly ten minutes now, and if he didn't choose his flight co-ordinates soon, Lunar Control would bring the craft back to base under autoflight. This sense of time restriction increased Ket's frustration. He gazed moodily at the control panel.

More precious seconds passed, and he still hadn't made up his mind. The small red warning light on the panel began to wink softly. He had thirty seconds before Control operated the emergency procedures. In a sudden desperate fit, Ket's fingers snaked towards the double row of buttons and punched out a random numerical sequence.

Jumping from orbital flight to hyperspace without proper co-ordinates was roughly equivalent to playing Russian Roulette with a sub machine gun and only one blank cartridge. The ship could easily materialise in the uncharted reaches of space, from where it could never return—or even in the centre of a sun. These facts passed through Ket's mind in the split second before the grey haze which always accompanied hyperspacing descended on it. There was the faintest sensation of falling and spinning. A sharp knife of pain tearing through his body.

Then he blacked out completely.



The light hurt his eyes. Ket blinked, and a sharp wave of pain shot across his eyeballs. His body felt as though it had been fed through a scrap metal reducing plant. He tried to move his head a little, by way of an experiment and wished he hadn't as nausea welled up in his stomach, and the pain throbbed across his brain. He cautiously opened his eyes again, and peered through tiny slits. There was a whitish blur in front of him—something he vaguely recognised.

The blur spoke. 'Ah, you're back in the world of the living,' it said with a trace of nervous, relieved humour. Ket stared weakly at the blur. It gradually formed into a face. A female face.

Ket tried to rise, and screamed out loud with the pain. He flopped back, fighting hard to stop from blacking out again.

'Where the hell am I?' he managed to mutter.

'At the moment, you're in a hospital bed—and from the state of you, I'd say you'll be there for some time yet.' The relief in the voice was more pronounced. 'You've been in a coma for nearly three days.'

Ket's dazed mind took in these facts and played with them like sponge rubber balls.

'Hospital? ... Where, how?'

'Shushh! The voice took on a firm, authoritative tone. 'You're in no condition to ask questions. Try to relax. Here, drink this!—the face produced a hand, holding a small tumbler of whitish liquid.

Ket screwed up his face in disgust at the first sip, but drained it bravely. Nothing happened until it hit his stomach, then it was like an intravenous injection of boiling sulphuric acid. A heatwave travelled down his throat, seared through his stomach wall, performed a kind of liquid bounce on the bottom of his groin and shot straight up again.

Ket had already passed out before it hit the top of his skull.

When he awoke for the second time, he was more aware of his surroundings. The room was uniformly white—unmistakably a hospital room. The dry, sterile odour of disinfectant hung in the air and the only sound was the soft swish of the air extractor.

Ket managed to twist his head enough to view three-quarters of the room. It was completely empty, and he couldn't see a door. For a second, this last fact started to panic him, and he shouted. The effort ran red hot circular saws through his chest. He was vaguely aware of the faint sigh of a pressure operated door opening from behind him.

The girl stood over him again, and her smile was a little less anxious.

'Hey now,' she said softly. 'You've had one very good attempt at killing yourself. What are you doing—trying for the all-time masochism record? The next time you want to shout, just remind yourself you've got three fractured ribs, a fresh operation scar the size of a large banana in your chest and a couple of pints of fresh air where you used to have blood.'

Ket grinned weakly. 'Anything else?'

The girl's face hardened slightly. 'Yes—there is something else ... but I don't know if you're ready for it yet.' She broke off abruptly.

Ket didn't like puzzles. 'Alright—let me have it. You had to amputate my head.' The humour was forced—and it showed.

'You really want to know?' She looked anxious again.

'Yes. Tell me the worst.'

The girl drew in her breath with a little heave. Ket noticed with a warm glow of pleasure how it lifted her taut little breasts another two degrees to the vertical.

She fumbled in the top pocket of her white overalls and took out a small pencil-shaped object.

'It's an intercom,' she said by way of explanation. 'I'll have to get Rick ... I mean Dr. Denfield. He can explain things to you much better than I can.' She smiled self-consciously and broke off with obvious relief as the door opened again.

'Oh Dr. ... I just started to explain to our patient ... but I got a little mixed up again ... as usual.'

Denfield looked over Ket with a warm smile. 'Miss Pelani loses her self confidence in the presence of strange men,' he said to Ket with mock seriousness. 'Only don't ever let her air of scatterbrained womanhood fool you. She's the most brilliant biologist—male or female—this side of Alpha Centauri. And colleague is a much better word than assistant,' he added, turning to the girl. 'And far more accurate.'

Ket's mind was performing mental acrobatics. 'Look, what's all this about?' he managed to get out.

Denfield smiled again, somewhat indulgently. He looked like a child about to recite the Fifteen Spatio-Temporal Laws to a senile school robot.

He cleared his throat softly. 'When we fished you out of the wreck, you were in a pretty bad way. You had severe chest damage, concussion, internal haemorrhage and a dozen other minor chunks of damage. We got you into the hospital as soon as we possibly could, and I operated, with Miss Pelani's assistance. Unfortunately, a sliver of metal lodged in your chest punctured your heart during the operation and you died on the table. Now—to put it simply ... I attempted an experiment with you, based only on a private theory of mine ... and it worked. I have given you a new life. I merely replaced your natural life force with another type of life. Implanted in your chest is a small power unit which is pumping blood into your veins and feeding a power—somewhat akin to electricity, but not quite—into your nerve centres.'

'Do you mean you've turned me into a bloody robot?' burst out Ket angrily, then controlled himself.

'Look, I can understand you're upset,' said Miss Pelani in a cool voice—'But I hardly think that's the attitude to adopt after Dr. Denfield has stayed awake for nearly three days to save your life.'

'I'm sorry,' said Ket feebly. 'What sort of life have you saved if I'm not even human any more?'

'Oh come now. It's not as bad as that,' Denfield said

defensively. 'Spare part surgery has been accepted on Earth for centuries now—there are thousands of people walking around with artificial hearts, kidneys and all sorts of organs. All I've done is to take the process a little bit further. You're still 100% human, I can assure you of that.'

Ket was slightly mollified. 'What happens when the battery—or whatever it is—runs down?' he asked resignedly.

'It won't. It can't. The energy unit is completely self-charging—briefly, it takes power from cosmic bombardment... and unless you go twenty miles into a lead mine, you'll never be away from that.'

'Then there's virtually no difference at all,' broke in Ket eagerly. 'I'm not walking around plugged into a power socket or anything? It's no different to any other normal human with a bit of mechanical surgery.'

'That's exactly what the Doctor was saying,' reminded Miss Pelani pointedly.

'Yes, I suppose it was.' Ket was silent for a few seconds. 'Well, Doc... I guess I owe you some thanks—or something. What does one usually say to people who bring you back from the dead?'

Denfield eyed him coldly. 'Before you get too flippant about it—let us both just remember that it was an experiment. You've only been here a few days. If, in a few weeks, you are still alive, you can buy me a drink.' He turned and started to walk out. 'Oh, by the way,' he called from the door. 'You'll never be able to get drunk again, I'm afraid. Just one of the unfortunate side-effects.'

The door sighed shut behind him. Ket whistled softly. 'Now there's what I call a cool customer,' he said conversationally.

'Well you were rather rude to him,' reproved Miss Pelani.

'Yes, I suppose I was. Sorry.'

She smiled. 'Well, I suppose it's not every day of the week you appear out of nowhere, on a planet which doesn't even exist, kill yourself and wake up to find you've been brought back to life. I think we can forgive you this time.' She crossed to the medicine cabinet and took out a small phial of white liquid.

'I think you've had enough excitement for the time being. You need more rest,' she said, pouring a small measure into a beaker.

'What is that stuff?' said Ket wearily.

'Well, we call it NR 27. It's another one of Dr. Denfield's specialities. It's derived from a native plant. The juice seems to combine the effects of a strong sedative and a strong stimulant—depending on what your body needs at the time. Come on now, drink it down.' She thrust the beaker under Ket's nose aggressively.

'No—wait.' Ket waved it away with a shrug of his head. 'There's a lot I want to ask you... Where am I, how did I get here, who are you all, and what did your magical Doctor want to save my miserable life for?... Oh, and while we're on the subject, what did you mean just now by saying this planet didn't exist?'

'Well—if you feel well enough to talk.' She seemed hesitant.

'Sure. I feel on top of the universe.'

'O.K. then. Let's have the questions—one at a time—and I'll do what I can to answer them for you.'

Ket thought for a moment, trying to make up his mind which to ask first.

'Right—how did I get here?' he asked finally.

Miss Pelani lifted one slim eyebrow quizzically. 'I thought you were going to tell us that... We don't even know who you are... or where you came from.'

Ket grinned. 'That's easy. Ket Fontaine, and last time I looked, I was in orbit outside Luna Space Port. I seem to have punched the wrong button somewhere along the line.'

'You seem to have punched quite a few wrong buttons. Have you any idea of where you are?'

'No. Surprise me,' said Ket nonchalantly.

Another smile. 'Haven't we surprised you enough for one day?'

Ket smiled back at her. 'What do I call you besides Miss Pelani or Angel?' he said.

She laughed. 'Nova,' she said. 'Nova Pelani. Rick—Dr. Denfield and I run the only hospital here. It's not really supposed to be a hospital. This room is really only a rest room. This is the laboratory building.'

'What laboratory? What are you here for?' asked Ket, none the wiser.

Nova frowned suddenly. 'I don't know how much I ought to tell you... yet,' she said cautiously. 'I guess we will all have to get to know one another a little. It's really up to Rick what we do about you. After all, you're the first person to find this planet in nearly two hundred years.'

'What planet?' said Ket in exasperation. 'Just where in the galaxy am I?'

'I'm afraid you'll have to ask Dr. Denfield all you want to know... I'll tell you one thing, though—you're not in the galaxy... at least, not *your* galaxy. As for the planet, we choose to call it *Rebellia*.' Nova Pelani waved the beaker of medicine under Ket's nose again. Now, are you going to take this, or do I have to pump it into you with a syringe?'

Ket took the medicine and drained it with one brave gulp.

Nova's beautiful oval face misted over and started to dissolve as the drug seeped through his system. The last thought before he passed out again was that Nova's red hair looked as though it were bursting into flame.

### THREE

'The planet used to be called *Paradio*,' said Rick Denfield a few weeks later as he and Ket strolled in the garden adjoining the laboratory. 'The story goes that this place was first discovered by the Colonisation Board way back in 2061 and put on the list for future settling.'

'It's such a beautiful climate,' said Ket. 'It seems strange that nobody took it over sooner.'

Rick laughed. 'They did—let me tell you the full story. As I was saying, the CB placed the planet on the immediate list in 2061. It was a cert for early colonisation. As you can see, it is practically a paradise planet—a .85 gravity, heavily oxygenated, a sub-tropical climate and plenty of water and natural resources. Well, to cut a long story short, the first families were moved in by 2075, the planet was officially named Paradio, and marked off as colonised. Then, for some reason, the authorities seem to have forgotten about it for a few decades. When they remembered, it was decided to send up an investigating committee to see how the first settlers had developed the place, and whether it was ready for Urban Development'—Rick broke off with a chuckle.

'So then what happened?' said Ket eagerly.

Rick continued laughing for a few moments. 'That's when the fun began,' he said finally. 'When the investigators arrived, they found that the landing strip had been torn up, making it impossible for the ship to make a safe landing.'

'Why?'

'Well, it seems that the planet had proved *too* much like Paradise. The settlers had had time to really settle in, get to know the place and love it. They had also had time to think, and had come to the conclusion that they didn't want the planet opened up for general development, so that vultures—the financiers, the real estate speculators, the get-rich-quick boys—could move in and take over. The total population was still under 200 and they had a pretty close-knit community going. They decided that Paradio would remain a highly private planet.'

'So what did they do?' asked Ket, fascinated.

Rick laughed again. 'Well, first of all, they ploughed up any pieces of flat land where a ship could have landed, and destroyed the main landing strip. Then they rearranged the outline of the town, and built all the houses in a geometrical pattern which spelled out a very direct message from the people to anyone who looked down on Paradio from the air.'

'What was this message?' said Ket.

'Well,' said Rick, 'it was very simple, very direct and very rude. It consisted of two short words, which left no doubt in the investigators' minds as to the reception they would get if they *did* manage to land. The committee returned to Terra, and relayed the message back to the Colonisation Board. After a lot of talking, and hoo-hah, the Board finally decided to write it off to experience, scrubbed Paradio off the Galactic lists, and forgot about it.'

Ket laughed loudly. .

'You see the joke?' said Rick, laughing with him.

'Yes—it's priceless,' said Ket between guffaws. 'Oh my God, what would I have given to have been one of those settlers. I can just imagine the looks on the faces of those stuffed up beaureaucratic investigators.'

Rick looked at Ket for a long, piercing second. 'I think,' he said slowly, 'that you may well turn out to be

one of us, Mr. Fontaine.'

Ket returned his gaze. Something in Denfield's tone had struck a faint chord, and he struggled to remember what it was . . . Of course, it was how Nova had reacted a few weeks ago when he had asked her more about the planet, and the people. Like he was some sort of . . . intruder, and an outsider. The two men walked on in silence for a while.

Finally Ket framed in his mind what he wanted to say.

'Rick,' he said slowly and thoughtfully.

'Yes?'

'Since I've been here, I've been conscious of an . . . oh, I don't know . . . *atmosphere*, I suppose.'

Denfield's face looked stern. 'Go on.'

'Well,' continued Ket, 'it's just as though this whole planet is some sort of a highly private club . . . For some reason, you all seem to resent my coming . . . I can't help getting the feeling that I've stepped into something which is . . . undercover, or something.'

'You're very perceptive, Mr. Fontaine,' Denfield made a slight gesture of acknowledgement.

'And for God's sake why this formality,' asked Ket.

'The name's Ket.'

Denfield smiled thoughtfully. 'Alright . . . Ket . . . you ask if this planet is some sort of a private club. Well—I suppose you could call it that, in a way.'

'A hangover from the old days, perhaps,' suggested Ket.

Denfield shrugged. 'Not really—although perhaps this planet's heritage has affected us all more than we know.'

'So you wish I hadn't turned up?' said Ket.

'Yes'—Denfield didn't attempt to make the statement any softer.

'So why save my life . . . I mean, bring me back to life? If you didn't want me here, you had no worries. I was dead. Why go to all this trouble to revive me?'

'I had no choice,' said Denfield simply. 'You are a human being—the oaths I took many years ago as a doctor forced me to do what I did . . . And anyway . . . we had to know why you had come here, and how you managed to get to Rebella.'

'I'll tell you,' said Ket. 'It's really very simple.'

'You don't have to. We already know.'

Ket was mystified. 'You already know?' he said in puzzlement. 'But how? I haven't had a chance to discuss it with you yet.'

Denfield smiled mysteriously. 'Oh yes you have,' he said. 'We had a very long chat about it a few days ago. I'm afraid I know as much about you, Ket, as you know about yourself . . . probably more.'

He looked at Ket's troubled face. 'Alright—I'll tell you,' he said with a condescending smile. 'You and I spent nearly two days of intensive discussion under hypnosis. I know your life history from the time you were a child.'

Ket was startled. 'Everything?' he said cautiously.

Denfield nodded. 'Everything . . . You've been quite a lad in your time, Ket—I must give you that.'

Ket shuddered. 'How frightening.'

'Yes, I suppose it must seem a little frightening to you. But, unfortunately, we found it necessary... One of the side effects of NR27—that drug which aided your recovery—is that it makes the patient utterly receptive to the commands of anyone else.'

'A zombie drug,' Ket interrupted.

'I'm not sure I approve of your choice of words, Ket... but, yes, I suppose you could say that. Believe me, I was not at all keen on doing it. But I was outnumbered... I'm sorry,' he finished lamely.

'Outnumbered? By who—Miss Pelani?'

'No, Nova was on my side. The Committee took a vote on it, and we were outnumbered three to two. Varg and his colleagues insisted.'

'Who's Varg?' said Ket, becoming more and more bogged down in puzzlement.

Mr. Varg is the other half of our science and technical committee,' explained Denfield. 'Miss Pelani and I handle the "soft" sciences—biology and psychiatry—and Mr. Varg and his associates are the physics and chemistry wizards... Ah, there's Varg now.'

Ket turned his head in the direction Denfield was looking. A white-coated figure was just walking out of the laboratory building. He stopped as Denfield shouted to him, and turned in their direction. As he approached, Ket noticed that he walked with a stiff, jerky gait. He was very dark—probably of negroid ancestry, thought Ket. His black hair hung over his low forehead in a lank straggly mass. It gave him an appearance of ferocity, which the eyebrows and short moustache didn't help to dispel. He came right up to them.

'Our patient is fully recovered,' Denfield said conversationally. 'Ket Fontaine—meet Dr. Gabriel Varg—the nearest thing to a technical genius you will ever meet.'

Ket smiled, and held out his hand. Varg made no move to take it. He looked straight through Ket with a sneer. 'We should have disposed of you while we had the chance,' he said curtly. 'Meddlers are not welcome here.' Varg turned abruptly on one heel and strode off.

Denfield turned to Ket with acute embarrassment. He tried to pass it off as a joke, but Ket could see he was rattled.

'Varg is a funny customer,' he said with a forced laugh. 'No-one would believe that he is really quite a decent chap underneath it all.'

Ket wasn't very convinced. 'He didn't seem very decent to me,' he said pointedly.

Denfield shrugged nervously. 'Oh, you'll get used to him, I guess. It's too late for him to change now, I'm afraid. Varg has been like that for the last forty years... he doesn't bite, he just makes a lot of threatening noises.'

Ket's mind raced. Denfield had said something which had jarred in his mind like a whore at a wedding. He realised what it was.

'How long did you say he's been like that? Forty years?... But he only looks about thirty seven.'

Denfield looked at Ket in panic. 'A slip of the tongue,'

he blustered quickly. 'I meant fourteen years.'

Ket stared at him carefully. The man was nervously chewing at his bottom lip, and his previous composure was shattered. He was lying, and Ket could see it.

'Alright, Denfield—what are you trying to hide here?' he said suddenly.

Denfield looked at him nervously. 'Hide?... Nothing,' he said quickly—too quickly.

Ket jumped in while he held the advantage. 'Look, Denfield—I'm no fool. If you know my personality so well, you know that I have an enquiring mind, and an I.Q. of 150. So I'm not an easy man to fool. I know there's something funny going on here, and I want to know what it is.'

Denfield stared at him silently for several minutes. 'Alright, Fontaine,' he said finally. 'You might as well know.' He paused for a few more seconds.

'Gabriel Varg is seventy-three years old,' he said at length. He is three years my senior. We've been friends since childhood.'

Ket stared at his companion in amazement. It didn't make sense. Denfield looked 30 at the most. His tanned face was devoid of wrinkles, and his pale grey eyes shone with the sparkle of youth.

'You mean you've discovered the secret of immortality?' he managed to gasp eventually.

'No, not immortality,' said Denfield. 'A process for lengthening life, that's all.'

'For how long?' Ket wanted to know.

'We don't know... yet,' said Denfield with a shrug. 'We only discovered the process just over 40 years ago. There is a plant which seems native to this planet which yields several useful drugs... NR27 is one of them. During a series of experiments with Gnurks...'

'What's a Gnurk?' interrupted Ket.

'It's a small rodent-like animal which is very common here,' explained Denfield. 'They are similar in many ways to your native earth guinea pig, and we find they are very useful for laboratory experiments... Anyway, during the course of a series of experiments, we found that the Gnurks reacted most strangely to one of these derivatives from the plant. Their hair stopped growing. We thought this was odd, because the Gnurk's hair grows at a fast rate under normal conditions. At frequent intervals, the old coat seems to drop off, and a fresh one grows again... So we extended the experiments over a period of years. We discovered that the animals did not age to any appreciable extent. Although the animal has a normal life-span of only about ten years, under the drug, they seem to live indefinitely.'

'Have you kept the original specimens alive for all this time?' asked Ket.

'Yes, but there is no way of telling how long it will last. That's why I said that the drug only extends life... it just stops the ageing process. In the case of the Gnurks, it has so far multiplied their life span by four times. It doesn't necessarily follow that it will affect the human metabolism in exactly the same way... And again, if the drug wears off, the dying process could



even be accelerated.'

'So you are over seventy years old?' said Ket, with a whistle of astonishment.

'Yes.'

'And Nova . . . is she an old woman too?'

Denfield's voice hardened again. 'Miss Pelani is no concern of yours,' he said sharply. 'Now I'm afraid I must get back to the lab. I have spent far too much time away from my work.' He started to stride off.

Ket ran after him. 'Hey. Now what have I said? . . . 'Look, Denfield . . . I begin to understand a little of your aloofness now. Is this the "club" I thought I felt?'

'Perhaps.' Denfield's tone was uncommunicative.

Ket saw he wasn't going to get much further with Denfield at the moment. He stopped, and let him walk away. Ket stood watching Denfield's dwindling figure, thinking over the revelations the morning had brought.

After several minutes, he walked slowly back towards the laboratory buildings.

#### FOUR

Nova Pelani most definitely was a concern of his, Ket decided immediately, as he bumped into her coming round a corner in the lab. Most definitely. She had changed out of the sterile white smock she had been wearing in her role as nurse, and the toga-like garment she was wearing now did a lot more for her figure.

Not that her figure needed much help, Ket thought quickly. It would have asserted itself quite adequately in a cardboard box. Her big blue eyes flickered over him with a twinkle of amusement.

'You're quite recovered, I see,' she said jauntily.

'Thanks to my wonderful nurse,' Ket laughed.

Nova blushed very very slightly. 'So this is how you show your new found vigour is it? Barging round corridors and trying to knock people over.'

'I'm sorry,' said Ket quickly. 'I was in a bit of a daze. I've just had a long chat with Denfield. He told me a few rather shattering things.'

Nova looked surprised. 'He must like you,' she said. 'Rick is never usually one to share secrets too quickly.'

'Except with you,' said Ket quickly, and noted how quickly Nova coloured.

'Just *what* has Dr. Denfield been telling you?' she asked.

'Ooh—this and that, you know. There were a couple of things he didn't have to tell me though. A blind man could see he was madly in love with you.'

'Richard and I are just colleagues,' she retorted rather coldly.

'That's only your version,' joked Ket.

She tried to push past him.

'You are a very nosy person, Mr. Fontaine,' she said.

'And I don't think I like that.'

Ket pulled his face into a comic expression of sorrow. 'Will no-one on this planet be friendly to me?' he lamented.

Nova's expression melted. She laughed despite herself.

'That's better,' said Ket with relief. 'Now—let's con-

solidate our new found friendship by agreeing to call each other by our first names . . . Agreed?'

'Agreed.'

'That's a good start,' said Ket, warming up. 'Now how about you showing me around this place? . . . You are off duty, aren't you?'

Nova smiled sweetly. 'Yes, I am. But I'm afraid I can't be your escort.'

'Why not?'

'Because I don't know yet what you are allowed to see, and what you are not,' she replied. 'It's as simple as that.'

'Oh.' Ket was a little put back. 'Still the house of mysteries, eh?'

'Perhaps.' Her tone was non-committal.

'Well if you won't take me around, I suppose I'll just have to do a bit of snooping on my own,' said Ket. 'There doesn't seem to be anything to stop me doing that.'

Nova smiled. 'You obviously haven't noticed Ferdie,' she said, gesturing into the air above Ket's head. He whirled.

Poised about five feet above his head was a strange little box of tricks which flashed tiny lights like a portable galaxy.

'And what in the name of Andromeda is *that*?' said Ket.

'It's a camera robot. It's also, for the time being, your personal guard,' announced Nova. 'I'm afraid you can't "snoop around" as you put it. If you attempt to go anywhere you shouldn't, Ferdie will relay a warning signal to the control room, and you will be restrained.'

'Look—am I a bloody prisoner here or something?' burst out Ket with genuine anger.

'No, you're not a prisoner. You are quite free to go almost anywhere. It's just that there are a lot of things you are not ready to know just yet. I'm sorry,' she finished apologetically.

Ket repressed his temper. 'OK, so nobody trusts me. Great.' He thought for a second. 'Nova . . . do you suppose this thing would follow us around if I asked you to join me in whatever passes for dinner and a show on this planet tonight?'

She giggled.

'Are you still in love with me?' she said suddenly, teasingly.

Ket looked stupidly blank.

'I was there when we ran you through the hypnosis session,' she said with an evil grin. 'You really did say a lot.'

Ket took the joke. He grinned back good-naturedly. 'Well—will you?' he said.

Nova thought for a moment. 'I'm not sure,' she said. 'I'll have to think about it. I don't know if you're the sort of man a nice girl like me ought to mix with.'

'What do you mean by that?'

Nova put on an expression of mock horror. 'Well, Mr. Fontaine . . . after what you did to that poor little belly dancer on Plebron . . .'

Ket winced. 'That too?'

'Yes. That too... Every sordid detail I'm afraid.' She laughed.

'I guess I have a lot to live down,' said Ket, laughing with her. 'But you could always choose to live dangerously.'

Nova pursed her lips and shook her head. 'I'll think about it,' she said. 'I'll let you know.' She started to walk off.

Ket started after her. 'How will you let me know?'

She pointed above his head again. 'Ferdie is a two-way transmitter. I'll give him a message.' She walked off.

Ket watched her receding back for a while, noting the beautiful movement of her gorgeously rounded posterior clashing against the geometric vertical and horizontal lines of the corridor. He glanced up at the robot, floating silently and menacingly above his head.

'What a hell of a thing to act as cupid,' he muttered at it softly.

Ket walked slowly in the direction of the hospital room, which up to now had served him as living accommodation. He saw about half a dozen people on his way—all of them dressed in the white uniform of the laboratory, but they pointedly ignored him. Ket sat down on the edge of the bed and tried to think.

His mind refused to create logical patterns. Try as he might, Ket could not make the few fragments of information he now held about Rebellia fit into any sensible pattern. There were still far too many things he didn't know. Of only one thing was he absolutely sure—he had fallen by the sheerest chance into a situation which was beyond his, and probably anyone else's imagination.

He went to the clothes locker, and fumbled through the pockets of his yachting jacket. Nova's voice gently admonished him from the robot still hovering above his head.

'If you're looking for your cigarettes, Ket, I'm afraid you won't find them,' she said softly. 'I destroyed them personally. We don't like the use of drugs on Rebellia.'

Ket looked up. 'Can we conduct a conversation through this thing?'

'Yes.'

'If I swear, will it burn out a circuit or anything?'

'I doubt it.'

Ket swore—loudly. 'What sort of a torture chamber is this?' he asked irritably. 'You more or less lock me away in this room, act like a band of schoolchildren with a private club, and then take away from a man his one small consolation... And anyway,' he concluded bitterly, 'SynthoBacs are not a drug... they're completely nicotine-free.'

'They're merely a palliative for lazy minds,' chided Nova's voice. 'Why douse the consciousness when one can use 100 per cent of your brain 100 per cent of the time?'

Ket snorted with disgust. 'If I tried to use 100 per cent of my mind at the moment, I'd probably go mad... Maybe that's the idea—you're experimenting with

me, trying to see how long it takes me to go raving out of my mind.'

Nova chuckled. 'Nothing so glamorous, I'm afraid... Anyway, you are about to get a lot of your answers. I've just been speaking to Rick. He wants to have a long talk with you.'

'Now?' said Ket eagerly.

'Yes. Meet us outside the main entrance in about three minutes.'

'I'm on my way.' Ket made for the door.

'Oh, Ket,' Nova called softly.

'Yes?'

'Say goodbye to Ferdie—we're calling h'im off.'

Ket grinned. 'I can't say that I'm going to miss his sparkling company,' he said, and glanced up at the robot as it swung away over his head and swooped through the open door.

Ket stood outside the main entrance to the laboratory and twiddled his thumbs. Now that he was about to be fully initiated into the secrets of Rebellia, he felt a slight unease. He couldn't help thinking that he was about to make a discovery which would set a completely new outlook on the rest of his life. He was more than a little psychic, as it turned out.

Ket didn't have long to wait. Denfield and Nova appeared from round the corner of one wing of the lab building in a small transparent air car. It stopped in front of him, hovering noiselessly about eight inches above the ground. The hatch opened.

'Hop in,' said Denfield pleasantly.

Ket stepped in and settled himself into the large seat beside Nova. Denfield flicked a small catch on the control panel and the entrance hatch closed. The air car swung upwards and outwards, rising to about a hundred feet and describing a long lazy circle. They swept round the longest wing of the lab buildings and headed towards a ring of small trees which marked off the end of the adjoining gardens.

'Why the sudden change of heart?' said Ket with scarcely repressed elation.

Denfield shrugged. 'We couldn't have kept you in the dark for ever,' he replied. 'Now is as good a time as any—while your mind is still in a receptive mood. If we had tried to keep you in solitary confinement for much longer, you might have developed feelings of antagonism towards us... and that would never do.'

Nova spoke, turning towards him. 'First, a whistle-stop tour of Rebellia,' she said, 'and then we'll have a long talk.'

The air car swooped over the ring of trees.

'Look,' said Nova, clutching at Ket's sleeve. 'There's Capital City.'

Ket followed her proud gaze, and stared out of the observation window ahead of him. He drew in his breath with a gasp of admiration. 'Good God... it's beautiful,' he said, with unconcealed admiration.

The city was like nothing he had ever seen before. In fact, to call it a city was an insult... if one compared it

with the mass of buildings which went under the same name on Earth. The laboratory buildings had been squat, plain, functional—but the architecture he saw beneath him could be called none of these things.

It could not have been mere planning which had gone into the construction of the city—it was creation. The entire layout was like a spontaneous work of art, but like no art-form ever known on Earth. Obviously planning *had* gone into the foundation of the city, but it must have been inspired planning—a touch of unusual genius.

Denfield touched the control panel of the air car again. 'I'll take her up a few hundred feet,' he said. 'You can get a better idea of the layout.' The craft rose rapidly.

Ket's admiration grew as the whole city structure became apparent. It radiated from a huge circular building in the centre like the petals of a gigantic flower. There was no section of the city which was without an enclosing belt of green. Brightly coloured patches, which Ket took to be ornamental gardens or parks, surrounded every block of buildings. The buildings themselves were all individual creations, yet had the one unifying spirit of simplicity. Angles did not seem angular; the most intricate curves and convolutions did not seem at all contrived. Tall buildings didn't overpower the smaller ones, flat buildings evaded the squat, ugly look that they usually had.

The use of colour, too, had been worked into the very heart of the city layout, giving an utterly new dimension to the buildings. On Earth, the cities were a uniform dirty white...an almost solid landscape of pre-cast concrete.

Nova turned to him, and her face was glowing with pride. 'Do you like it?'

'It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen,' said Ket truthfully. 'It doesn't even look real...it looks just as though it were laid down with a paintbrush.'

Nova smiled. 'Capital City is our showpiece,' she said. 'Sometimes I regret the fact that we never have the chance to show it to anyone.'

'You're showing it to me,' said Ket.

'Yes, we are, aren't we,' said Nova quickly, and her face brightened. She pointed a finger at the circular structure in the centre of the city. 'That's the Community Centre, and the Coliseum. It is the heart of the city—in many more ways than one. And that very low, long building,' she added, directing Ket's gaze, 'is the Education Centre. That's where we are going.'

The air car plunged into a graceful dive.

'What's the population?' asked Ket.

'The city, or the entire planet?'

'Both.'

Nova thought for a minute. 'Well, at the last census, the total population of Rebella was four and a half million. About sixty per cent of the population live in the cities, about half of those in Capital. All the rest are scattered around in smaller villages, or they are farming families living on their own estates.'

'Where are the industrial centres?... The city looks too clean to have any factory areas.'

'Oh, they are there,' said Nova with a smile. 'Only they are all underground. You wouldn't see any signs of them even if they weren't, though. Our source of power is not at all messy.'

'What is it?' Ket asked, intrigued.

'You'd better ask Rick that one. He can explain these technical things much better than I can.'

Ket turned to Denfield questioningly. 'Well?'

'The short answer is solar energy,' he said, 'but it's not quite as simple as that... Look, you see all the areas of park and gardens?'

Ket nodded.

'Well, they are not just there for decoration. They are, in fact, power grids. The actual vegetation is growing only in about six feet of topsoil. Underneath the soil are large areas of material which soak up and store cosmic energy. These are all linked up to the city's central power grid, which feeds everything.'

'And I suppose the energy is stored overnight, when the actual power is not being transmitted from the sun?'

'No, not quite. This where I have to start getting bogged down in technicalities,' Denfield smiled. 'First of all, Rebella doesn't have a day and night, as you understand them.'

'But it *does*,' Ket started to say, but Denfield cut him short.

'Wait a minute—let me finish... As I was saying, Rebella doesn't really have a day and night. Now I know, you've seen our nights, but it isn't a natural phenomena.' He glanced quickly at Ket, and smiled as he saw his puzzlement. 'You see Ket,' he went on, 'Rebella is in a very peculiar planetary system. As far as I know, it is unique. This system consists of two suns, and only the one planet. Rebella hasn't even got a moon... Now—the two suns have very small elliptical orbits of their own, and as a rough guide, let's say they are situated approximately by what you would call the North and South Poles of this planet. Now then, Rebella has a sort of figure of eight orbit, which brings it round either sun once every 24 hours. To complicate this even further, Rebella has a slow polaric spin of its own which turns it round completely in the same period of time. So you see, there is no time in which any part of the surface of the planet is turned away from one of the suns, nor does it vary in distance to any appreciable extent. The result of this is that the planet has a continuous daytime—from one or other of the suns.'

'So how does the night occur?' asked Ket, even more mystified.

'It didn't—many years ago. It had to be created, artificially... But to explain this brings me to one of the basics of Rebella, and I'll have to recap a little on the planet's history.'

'Go on.'

'Well... as I told you, the original colonists cut themselves off from Earth completely. After many years passed, Rebella, or Paradio as it was then, probably got

lost in some file at the Colonisation Board. We don't really know. All we *do* know is that the planet was never issued with a set of co-ordinates, and unless someone just happens to turn up a dusty reference, this planet is utterly lost and forgotten to Earth.'

'So that was why you were so worried when I crashed-landed. You thought I was a CB investigator?'

'For a while, yes,' Denfield admitted. 'And nobody liked the idea. . . . You see, Ket, the planet has grown up with this strong feeling of independence. As the place expanded and developed, the people worked out their own culture system which owed practically nothing to Earth. And they were fiercely proud of this. The people of Rebella thought that they had developed something which was pretty good. Earth, although far away and utterly remote, still worried them. Stories told of the shocking overcrowding of the cities, the mass-produced man that Earth had stereotyped and turned out in his millions. . . . there were tales of terrible slums, and personal repression. Individuals being crushed and maimed in the grinding mill of its civilisation.'

Ket laughed somewhat bitterly. 'They weren't too wrong, either.'

'Probably not. Anyway, right or wrong, they feared that someday, somebody would discover the planet again, maybe by accident, and then the trouble would begin all over again. . . . So they decided to do something about it—make sure that Paradio remained lost. After many years, they came up with an answer.'

'Which was?' Ket interrupted.

Denfield's tone dropped a shade, as though still speaking of the fact with reverence. 'They undertook,' he said slowly, 'what is perhaps the greatest single venture that man has ever undertaken. *They created a force field which covered the entire planet.*'

Ket gasped in astonishment. 'But how?'

Denfield laughed. 'That's the funny thing. No-one remembers now, how they *did* do it. All we know is that it exists. . . . a hundred miles above the atmosphere of Rebella is a permanent force-field, which will throw the instruments of any ship coming near it into utter confusion.'

'Then how did I arrive?'

'Quite simple. You made a hyper jump without co-ordinates. You could have ended up anywhere in the universe. . . . But, against odds of several billion to one, you hypered out *inside* the force field. . . . Only a few miles off the surface of the planet.'

Ket blinked. 'And lived to tell the tale, eh? Ye Gods. . . . How far am I, in light years—from Earth?'

'Without the hyperjump, you are approximately 3000 light years from Earth. To get back, or make the journey under normal circumstances, you would have to make at least six jumps. . . . and have co-ordinate points set up on the dot all the way. . . . Even then, you might not make it.'

'I'm sorry,' Ket said suddenly, 'but I seem to have taken you off the track. You were explaining about the day and night.'

'Oh yes—where was I? Yes, the force field. . . . Well, you see, it just happened to be a by-product of the force-field. The easy way to explain it is that the field is polarised. . . . So, at a certain conjunction of the two suns, the light from each of them is polarised, providing a belt of light which is reflected on itself. The end product is an artificial night. . . . an optical illusion. . . . Still, it only lasts for about five hours.'

Ket whistled. 'Quite a story.'

Denfield nodded. 'Just to round it off,' he added, 'the setting up of the force-field was like a final gesture of independence from Earth. That's when the people got together and decided to shuck off the old name which they'd had thrust upon them. A rebel planet deserved a rebel name. . . . hence Rebella.'

'Hold on to your stomach,' Nova cut in suddenly. 'We're going down.'

Ket was a couple of seconds too late getting the message. His intestines slopped against his ribs sickeningly as the car plunged down and made a perfect landing outside the Education Building.

Denfield switched off the power, and opened the hatch. 'Now for some more potted history,' he said, gesturing Ket out of the car. Nova climbed down behind him, and Ket couldn't help feeling that she was pressing close to him. . . . too close for his complete comfort.

'Ket'—her voice was urgent, whispering. Ket started to reply but she cut him short. 'No—don't speak to me. Walk on—ignore me, pretend I'm not here. . . . do anything, but don't let Rick see I'm talking to you.'

Ket walked on slowly, waiting for whatever it was Nova wanted to tell him.

'Listen, Ket,' she continued in the same conspiratorial tone, 'I *must* see you. . . . alone.'

'When?' he managed to whisper back.

'As soon as possible. . . . tonight. . . . in the gardens of the lab. . . . by the small lake, about eight o'clock.'

A slightly stupid smile crept over Ket's face. Hell, he was used to making conquests, but this was ridiculous. Nova dropped behind him. Denfield caught them up and walked ahead. He led them up to the doors of the Education building.

'Here we are,' he said, gesturing Ket and Nova through the doors. 'This is where the history of Rebella is recorded.'

The trio walked into the air-conditioned building, their footsteps echoing through the empty halls.

The afternoon passed slowly. Although Ket tried to keep his interest up, even the fascinating history of Rebella couldn't keep Nova out of his mind. It was only a small part of his brain which took in all the information and detail that Denfield poured out as they walked through the vast building. Several times he looked at her during the afternoon, but she ignored him—always looking away or pretending to be interested in something. Ket fancied she looked frightened. He was puzzled—it wasn't the normal reaction of a woman who had just arranged a romantic rendezvous.



'So now you know as much about the history of Rebella as the rest of us do,' concluded Denfield, as they came out to the entrance hall again. 'Tomorrow, Ket, I'll show you some of the work we are doing at the lab, and perhaps I can spare the time to take you through Capital City itself.'

Ket smiled. 'Yes, that would be nice,' he said. The trio returned to the air-car.

## FIVE

Ket walked aimlessly around his new room. As Denfield had pointed out, he couldn't go on living in a hospital bed. The new apartment was in the living quarters. It was sparse, but comfortable. A small intercom system mounted on one wall kept him in contact with the Services department, and anything from a meal to a clean set of clothes would be delivered within a minute of his request. Ket sat down on the edge of his bunk, a worried look on his face.

Ket had a lot to think about. Firstly, he had been forced to the decision that having found Rebella, he wasn't going to be able to leave it... ever. As far as he could ascertain, Rebella had never needed, and never built, any space ships, and there was no contact with any other planet. He was marooned on the planet. Then there was Nova's strange behaviour this afternoon. The more Ket thought about it, the less it seemed as though she wanted to see him for any personal reasons. She had looked too worried, too nervous. Ket didn't like it one bit... Then, of course, there was still the feeling he had had since he came to Rebella. The feeling of unease, of something going on around him, but something he couldn't quite put his finger on.

The talk with Denfield this afternoon hadn't helped a great deal. True—he now knew a lot more about the planet, and the people, but there was still that elusive something which didn't fit. Ket was sure that it stuck out like a sore thumb, but maybe he was up too close to see it clearly.

He glanced nervously at his watch for the tenth time in the last two hours. Twenty to eight. Maybe what Nova had to say to him would lift some of the mystery. He rose, and crossed the room to the wall cupboard.

He had been issued with the uniform clothes of the laboratory staff. His own clothes, Ket supposed, had been too torn and probably bloodstained in the crash. He took down a clean white one-piece suit and a heavier over-jacket in case the night was a little cool. Then he remembered that the night wasn't really a night at all, and the temperature would be almost the same as in daylight. He replaced the jacket, and headed for the door.

It was pitch dark. Ket headed for the small lake, relying on his memory and the dim light from the windows of the lab. More than once he stumbled off the path and felt his feet sink into the soft, yielding surface of the flower beds. A small beam of light danced in front of him.

'Ket?'

'Yes. Is that you, Nova?'

'Yes. Stay there,' she commanded, and approached him, shining the thin beam of the torch in his face as though seeking to positively identify him. Ket felt her fingers close around his arm.

'Come with me.' Ket allowed her to guide him along the path, and round the side of the ornamental lake. The torchlight picked out the shining side of the air-car.

'Get in, quick.'

Ket obeyed wordlessly. He was swept away by the urgency in Nova's tone, and the repressed excitement of these nocturnal happenings. He thought he heard a faint rustle and froze.

'Did you hear anything?' he whispered to Nova, who was just climbing into the cockpit beside him.

She was silent for a few seconds, listening. 'It was probably a Gnurk or something,' she said at last. 'Hold tight.'

The car lifted, and swept away towards the trees. Back by the lake, Gabriel Varg's eyes rose and followed them. He stood still after they had gone, for several minutes. Then, his face creased with thought, he walked slowly back towards the lab.

Once over the ring of trees, the tiny cockpit of the air car was illuminated by the lights of the city ahead of them. Ket turned to Nova with a smug smile in his face.

'Hell of a lot of trouble to go for a date,' he said, smiling.

Nova's tense face glanced quickly up from the controls. 'This isn't a joy ride, Ket,' she retorted coldly.

Ket's smile faded from his face. He hadn't for one second thought that it was. 'Where are we going?' he said, more seriously.

She spoke without looking up. 'Somewhere we can talk... I don't trust anywhere around the laboratory. I'm taking you to my parents' flat—they're away up country on business for a couple of weeks.'

'Your parents? ... then you're not...'

'No,' said Nova, guessing his thoughts, 'I'm not on the longevity drug. I'm a nice, simple 24 years old... I think.'

'You think?' Ket said, puzzled.

'I'm just not sure of anything any more, Ket. I'm feeling like you are, I expect... I don't know what's happening, what's already happened, and I'm scared.'

Ket glanced at her. Her bottom lip was trembling. She looked utterly child-like, helpless. And very, very beautiful. Ket wanted to put his arm around her, console her, but he realised he couldn't while she was controlling the air car. 'Look, Nova—what's all this about?' he said gently.

'I don't know, Ket... that's the trouble, I just don't know. Maybe it's nothing at all—maybe I'm just being silly, but I can't help having this feeling...' She broke off suddenly. 'Oh, hell, wait until we get down. When I've had a drink, and a chance to pull myself together, we'll talk.'

Ket nodded silently. He sat quietly for a minute or two. The craft swooped down on a tall building which

was obviously a block of living apartments, and landed on the flat strip outside the main entrance. Still silently, he followed Nova out of the car and into the building.

'Sit down,' she said to him as they entered the flat. 'I'll fix us both a drink.' She crossed to a cabinet on the other side of the room, took out a bottle and poured two large measures of purple liquid into large plastic beakers. She returned and sat down beside him on the large, comfortable air-cushion which served as a couch. She took a couple of large gulps of her drink before she gathered her composure.

'Alright, Nova. What's this all about?' said Ket, when she seemed to have recovered. 'Suppose you start at the beginning and work right through.'

Nova smiled faintly. Her brow was still furrowed with creases of worry. 'First of all, Ket... I don't even know why I'm confiding in you. I don't know why, but for some reason I trust you... And, God knows, I need someone to trust.'

Ket nodded sympathetically. 'Sure you can trust me,' he said—rather unnecessarily. 'Let's have it.'

Nova took another long swig at her drink. When she finally spoke, her face was tense, nervous. 'The story... about the history of Rebellia... that Rick Denfield told you this afternoon,' she began slowly.

'Yes?'

'... Well it isn't... it can't be true. He's lying, Ket.' 'Why do you say that?'

'Because none of it *fits*.... Oh, I know it sounds plausible enough—in fact, it's quite a sweet little story... but there is one basic flaw in the entire structure. Can't you see what it is, Ket?'

Ket thought for a moment. 'No, not really,' he said at last. 'I must admit I've felt that there was something odd here ever since I arrived, but I can't put my finger on it.'

'No—that's just it. There is nothing concrete one can point to and say—that's it.'

'So what do you think is wrong?' Ket asked.

Nova made an impressive pause. 'Alright, Ket,' she said. 'Let's look at the situation through your eyes. Now you crash on this planet, you wake up in a hospital and you start—obviously—asking questions. Right?'

'Right.'

'Only how do the answers you get seem to you?'

Ket shrugged. 'As I said before—quite believable, but only up to a point.'

'Exactly, Ket.... And you know *why* you find everything believable, don't you?'

'Maybe because I'm just a trusting person,' said Ket half-jokingly.

Nova smiled grimly. 'No, Ket. Because you judge anything by your own terms of reference... in other words, by those of the Earth you are accustomed to. Look—this is what I'm really trying to get across... the operation Rick performed on you... this longevity drug... the story of the force-field around the entire planet... the complex and vast power system this planet has... what impression of Rebellia do you get from all these impressive things?'

Ket thought for a while. 'An advanced and quite well adjusted civilisation,' he said at length.

Nova leaned forward excitedly. 'Exactly, Ket. As an outsider, seeing the place for the first time, it seems quite normal, but technologically advanced.'

'Yes, that's probably true,' admitted Ket.

Nova's voice dropped a couple of shades. 'Well don't you see Ket... *that's* what's wrong... That's what sticks out like a sore thumb. It just doesn't fit with the planet's history.'

Ket looked at her blankly. 'Sorry, but I don't get the point.'

Nova looked slightly exasperated. 'For God's sake, Ket... think about it... This planet shouldn't have any technology at all. Paradio was a very simple settler colony. The entire planet was a farming community, completely set against the thought of falling into the same trap as the Earth they despised so much had fallen into.... Do you see what I'm getting at?... The people of Paradio set their hearts on the idea of a return to the simple life... no vast machines, no space ships, no big cities, no pressure-cooker civilisation. What I'm saying, Ket, is that those people not only *couldn't* have built the force field, and the power grid system... but they *wouldn't* have. They just weren't the right sort of people to build up an advanced technology... And what makes it even more mysterious is that no living person on this planet can tell you how, or why the force field and power systems work.'

Ket's face creased into a frown of concentration. 'Look, Nova—I'm sure I get some of your point, but what exactly are you trying to say?'

'That Rebellia's civilisation didn't occur naturally. It couldn't have done. Somewhere, somehow, there was an outside influence.'

Ket grinned. 'What are you suggesting... that little bug-eyed monsters descended from the stars and took over?' he joked.

Nova stared at him coldly.

'Yes—something like that,' she said flatly.

Ket realised that she was serious and his smile faded. 'But that's ridiculous,' he said.

'Is it, Ket? Then you explain things.'

Ket was silent. Of course, Nova had a very good point. There was something definitely odd about Rebellia, and there was no convenient explanation to hand right now.

'Have you anything to support this theory?' he asked. Nova shook her head. 'No—nothing definite, anyway.'

'Then what gave you this idea?' asked Ket.

'It was the only theory which seemed to fit all the facts,' said Nova. 'Look—perhaps I'd better tell you everything I know.'

'There's not much point,' cut in a harsh voice from behind them.

Ket and Nova whirled round, to start into the cold eyes of Gabriel Varg and the ugly muzzle of the stunner gun he held firmly in his right hand.

'There's not much point because Miss Pelani has it

wrong . . . or wrong enough, anyway,' he said. 'But you have both become a nuisance with your needless meddling. It is time you were both dealt with.'

He waved the gun towards the door.

'Move—both of you,' he commanded.

Ket sized up the situation quickly, estimating the distance between Varg and himself. There was no chance, he realised, of jumping Varg before he could pull the trigger. Meekly, he obeyed, and Nova followed him through the door.

An air-car was parked outside. As they entered the craft, Ket noticed Rick Denfield seated at the controls. He looked strangely subdued.

'I'm sorry, Nova,' he muttered apologetically.

'Shut up, you snivelling fool!' snarled Varg curtly. 'If it wasn't for your sickening weakness we wouldn't have this trouble.'

Denfield turned to the controls of the craft like a scolded dog. Ket realised that he was completely under the control of his colleague.

The air-car lifted, skimmed across the city and landed by the Education Building.

'Inside,' snapped Varg as they climbed out of the car and walked into the building. Denfield led the way to the lift-shaft and Varg pushed Ket and Nova inside. The lift plummeted downward for a long time. When it finally stopped, Ket estimated that they were several hundreds of feet below ground level.

Denfield led the way into a vast laboratory. Nova gaped with surprise as they entered.

'You never told me we had another lab,' she said to Denfield.

'There are a lot of things I never told you,' he said in the apologetic tone he had used earlier. 'And now, I'm afraid it doesn't matter any more.'

He led the way through the laboratory and along a maze of corridors. Eventually, the party reached their destination—a large, white room which bore the unmistakable marks of an operating theatre.

'Prepare the equipment,' Varg said to Denfield. Then, turning to Ket, he waved the gun in his face. 'Sit over there, both of you,' he commanded, gesturing towards the floor in one corner of the theatre.

Nova reached for Ket's hand. He took it, squeezing it reassuringly as they did as they were told. Denfield busied himself at the workbench, filling a hypodermic syringe and sterilising surgical instruments.

'Everything is ready,' he announced at length. Varg nodded.

'We will operate on the girl first,' he said.

Ket saw the flicker of pain which crossed Denfield's face.

'Rick—what are you doing?' cried Nova, her voice rising with the hysteria of fear. 'Why are you letting Varg push you around like this?'

Varg allowed a thin, cruel smile to play around his fleshy lips.

'Doctor Denfield does as he is told, my dear,' he sneered. 'Just as you will when we have finished with you?'

Crossing the room, he seized Nova roughly by the arm and dragged her to the waiting operating table. She struggled violently, kicking and screaming as he forced her down.

'Quick, Denfield—the anaesthetic,' he said. Denfield approached with the hypodermic in his hand. He stood over Nova's struggling body . . . and hesitated.

'Well go on, you fool. What are you waiting for?' snapped Varg. 'Get on with it.'

Ket was studying Denfield's face intently. It was severely troubled. The tension between the two men was fast rising to explosion point. Suddenly Denfield threw the hypodermic to the floor.

'No—I won't do it,' he shouted quickly.

Varg lashed out brutally, smashing the heavy stunner gun across Denfield's face. As he recoiled from the pain, Varg placed the muzzle of the gun against Nova's temple.

'Get on with it or I pull this trigger in ten seconds,' he said coldly. 'And you'd rather have her alive than dead, wouldn't you Denfield?'

Denfield stopped in his tracks. Bending down to pick up the syringe, he spoke again. His voice was cowed once again, flat and emotionless.

'I'll have to get a clean syringe,' he said, and turned to the workbench once again.

'There's something I ought to tell Ket,' he said as he turned his back on Varg. 'The mechanical heart unit I installed in his body is completely unaffected by any form of electricity.'

Ket's brain reacted in a fraction of a second. He had been waiting for the tension between the two men to provide him with an opportunity. This was it, he realised in the moment that the meaning of Denfield's announcement struck home.

His body galvanised into action. Springing from the floor, he rushed at Varg.

Varg whirled, raised the stunner gun and fired at him.

At point-blank range, a stunner gun kills instantaneously. Even from a distance of several yards, it can freeze a man in his tracks.

The charge hit Ket squarely on the chest when he was about two feet away from Gabriel Varg.

Nova screamed.

Varg cursed, as Ket closed the small gap between them, smashed a powerful fist into his face and grappled with him for the gun. There was a muffled roar as the stunner discharged once more, and Varg slumped to the floor. Ket stared at the lifeless body for a few seconds, then turned to Denfield. 'Thanks,' he said in a shaken voice.

Nova had recovered herself and was staring at Ket incredulously.

'Ket, darling. You ought to be dead,' she said with relief in her voice.

'No, not from a stunner gun charge,' answered Denfield. 'The weapon works on the principle of static electricity—paralysing the heart and muscular system of

living creatures. I prayed that Ket would understand my message.'

'Which I did,' said Ket with a smile. 'Now what's it all about, Rick?'

Denfield turned towards Nova.

'What do you think of me, Nova?' he said. 'In all honesty—how do you regard me?'

'As a brilliant scientist, and one of the most gentle men I have ever known,' said Nova softly. 'Something like a second father.'

Denfield smiled sadly.

'And no more than that, eh?' he said.

The deeper meaning behind the question was obvious. Nova shook her head slowly.

'No, Rick . . . no more than that.'

Denfield smiled again. It was a brave smile.

'I congratulate you, Ket. You are a very lucky man,' he said simply. Ket looked down at Nova and smiled.

'Yes, I know,' he said.

Denfield crossed the laboratory to a row of cages which lined one wall.

'Nova was somewhere near the truth,' he said. 'But not quite there. She suspected that there was an outside alien influence upon the development of Rebellia's civilisation. Well it was alien—in a way—but it didn't come from outside. It was right here on the planet itself all the time.'

He pointed to the occupants of the cages.

'There's your "aliens",' he said with a wry smile. Nova and Ket looked into the cages.

Nova gasped incredulously.

'Gnurks? . . . But how?'

Ket stared at the harmless little rat-like creatures scurrying about inside the cages.

Denfield reached inside and took out a gnurk, cradling its small furry body in his hands and stroking it gently.

'These little things are one of Nature's mistakes,' he said. 'A sort of sick joke, really. If Nature was cruel, I'd say it was deliberate, but she isn't. . . . Just thoughtless sometimes.'

'They are the original inhabitants of this planet,' he went on. 'As a species, they are probably many millions of years old—and much the same as they started out. Evolution seems to have passed them by. They have no real intelligence. Their instincts are simple, extremely crude and compare very badly with that of other animal life throughout the universe. They do very little with their lives except breed and dig holes in the ground.'

He paused as if for effect.

'Yet these simple little rodents,' he went on, 'have a nervous system which fills the entire skull, continues down the backbone and takes in ninety per cent of all other bone tissue. They are, in a fact, a huge brain covered with a thin layer of flesh . . . and that brain has a potential capacity five times that of a human being.'

'Do you mean that these creatures are the real inventors of Rebellia's science?' asked Ket.

'Yes and no,' replied Denfield. 'Like I said, they are an evolutionary mistake. Nature endowed these creatures with fantastic brain potential. What she forgot to do was give them a spark of creative intelligence to let those brains work. She also gave the gnurks one single plant which makes up their staple diet . . . the plant from which we extract NR 27 and the hypnosis drug—or zombie drug, as Ket once called it. So you see—the poor little gnurk never had a chance . . . until Man came along.'

'I don't understand,' Nova said, puzzled.

Denfield smiled. 'Hold on,' he said. 'It gets more complicated yet. Imagine these empty super-brains—in their thousands—having been waiting for millions of years for something to stir them into action. Think, for example, of an extremely sophisticated computer . . . built with a fantastic memory-bank potential, but not a single piece of programming. . . . Then imagine an intelligent species arriving for the first time, and starting to feed in tiny pieces of information, examples of creative thought. The gnurk have eyes and ears. They saw Man arrive, they saw him build structures, they watched him follow a series of logical life-patterns. Suddenly, the dormant brain-power of these creatures started to come to life. They started to think.'

'But they have no communication,' said Nova. 'How could they possibly make contact with men, let alone influence them?'

Denfield shook his head.

'You say that gnurks have no communication,' he said . . . 'but you're wrong. They have no language, certainly, but they do have a crude form of telepathic transference between themselves. They are much like ants and bees on the planet Earth.'

'Wait a minute,' Ket interrupted. 'This doesn't make sense. How can a species with no background, no culture, no experience of creative intelligence suddenly start inventing scientific miracles?'

'They didn't,' said Denfield. 'The gnurks are still as crude as they always were—and always will be. What *did* happen though, was that their brains acted as amplifiers for human brains. The gnurks absorbed Man's intelligence by telepathy, magnified it five times, and re-transmitted it by the same process. Human beings, without knowing it, were made part of a symbiotic relationship in which they were the sole beneficiaries. The latent brain-power of the gnurks became a complement to the normal creative intelligence of the early settlers on Paradiso. When they wanted freedom from Earth, the gnurk influence improved their scientific capabilities until they were able to achieve their wish by building the force-field. When Capital City was built, the gnurks increased the artistic creativity of the planners and designers until they came up with a creative effort far in advance of their normal talents.'

'But something went wrong with this perfect relationship,' said Ket.

Denfield nodded. 'People like Varg went wrong,' he said, gesturing to the body in the corner. 'Unfortunately,



the gnurk's influence had another side to it... they also had the same effect on all of Man's bad traits, as well as his good ones. The urge to destroy, as well as create, got the same amplification treatment. Gabriel Varg was once just an ambitious young scientist. He became a madman with delusions of grandeur and a lust for power.'

'But why did you help him, Rick?' asked Nova.

'Because he left me no choice,' said Denfield simply. 'He was clever, and ruthless. Varg had two strong holds over me—my life and my feelings for you. The longevity drug was his discovery. He alone knew the formula. I need an injection of that drug every three days to keep alive. Varg has died with that secret still in his brain. ... And he knew how I felt about you,' Denfield went on, staring directly into Nova's eyes. 'He wanted me to perform a pre-frontal leucotomy on your brain—switch off your power of free thought and turn you into a mindless robot. Had I crossed him at any point, he would have performed the operation himself.'

'So that's what he was planning to do to us tonight?' said Ket.

'Yes,' replied Denfield. 'But he made the mistake of assuming I was cowed enough to obey him. There are

some things more important than life. When I realised that Nova was in love with you, I saw that there was nothing for me... and Varg's hold over me no longer applied.'

Nova rushed to Rick's side. Throwing her arms around him, she burst into tears.

Denfield pushed her away gently but firmly. 'I've had a fair three-score years and ten,' he murmured with a smile. 'And I've been lucky enough to have them all with a young body and a fresh brain. There's nothing to cry about.'

Ket was silent. There was nothing much to say. He thought of the immediate future.

He could never get away from Rebellia—the Rebel planet. He looked at Nova's beautiful tear-stained face and realised that he would never want to. A new life had been handed to him on a plate—a life in which there would be purpose, and a sense of pioneering. It was what he had always wanted.

'Rick,' he said softly. 'At least you know that Rebellia can now be the dream it started out to be.'

Denfield stretched out a hand and Ket grasped it firmly.

'Yes, I know,' he said with a smile.

## THE MERIT AWARD

Each issue, VISION OF TOMORROW will pay to the author of the leading story in that issue, as determined by the readers' votes, a bonus in addition to our regular rate. In this way, we will reward authors of outstanding stories, and provide extra incentive to create better fiction for our readers.

After you have read the stories in this issue, fill in the coupon alongside. Number the stories in the order which you place them, from 1 to 6. The results will be announced in a later issue. The reader whose voting most nearly parallels the final result, and who writes the best letter of 20 words or longer on why he or she selected the first place story for that position, will also be awarded a prize of £2 2s. 0d.

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In my opinion the stories in this issue rank as follows:  
NO. HERE

- .....MUSICALE by Sydney J. Bounds
- .....THE BITTER PILL by A. Bertram Chandler
- .....SHADOWS OF FEAR by Eddy C. Bertin
- .....REBEL PLANET by Peter L. Cave
- .....THE CHANGER by Harold G. Nye
- .....ELECTION by Frank Bryning
- .....PROBLEM CHILD by Peter Oldale
- .....A MATTER OF SURVIVAL by E. C. Tubb

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John Carnell

# THE IMPATIENT DREAMERS

## PART 8:

### The magazine that nearly was

In this month's special double instalment of the history of British Science Fiction, John Carnell reveals the secrets of the beginnings of *NEW WORLDS*, and author William F. Temple tells of the genesis of London Science Fiction Fandom.



William F. Temple

As Walter Gillings' campaign to promote science fiction in Great Britain progressed through the late 30's, so, too, did his enthusiasm communicate itself to the small but growing group of *aficionados* who were becoming linked by correspondence and local groups. I had first met Walter early in 1936, when I was assistant manager in a private printing company; a meeting which brought Eric Frank Russell and Leslie Johnson as visitors from Liverpool at a time when they were both active in the newly formed British Interplanetary Society, founded by Philip Cleator. I met them at Liverpool Street station—our only means of identification a copy of *Astounding SF* prominently displayed under an arm—and the three of us then journeyed to Ilford to the home of the Prophet, where we were more than impressed by both his collection and his seriousness.

Walter's enthusiasm was contagious, his connections with so many other sf personalities phenomenal, so like good disciples, we went out to spread the gospel and the net began to gather many more enthusiasts—Arthur C. Clarke, William F. Temple, Ken Chapman, John Beynon Harris, Eric C. Williams and Sydney J. Bounds, to mention a few whose names are currently familiar. There was also increasing contact between the loosely-knit London group and the active members of the several SF League Chapters at Nuneaton, Leeds, Liverpool and Glasgow, which had been promoted by the American *Wonder Stories*. The London link was more strongly forged when, on October 28th that year, the London branch of the BIS was formed and held its first meeting in the offices of Professor A. M. Low, in Lower Regent Street. Nearly all its members were also sf fans.

After nearly two years of steadily increasing activity, which saw the first British sf convention in Leeds in 1937 and the first London convention a year later, 1938 turned out to be a key year in the development of my own personal involvement with events to come. In March that year, the BIS was transferred from Liverpool to London, Professor A. M. Low became President and I became Publicity Director and editor of its *Bulletin*. In the summer, Leslie Johnson and I partnered a mail order magazine business called 'Science Fiction Service' with premises in Liverpool (our little yellow 'stickers' can still be found inside the covers of many collectors'

items of that time) and the Science Fiction Association which had been formed the year before, was transferred from Leeds to London with Ken Chapman as Secretary and myself as Treasurer.

It was at this time that the celebrated 'Flat' in Grays Inn Road came into its own as the centre of London sf activity. Arthur Clarke and William F. Temple, already in residence, were joined by Maurice K. Hanson, from Nuneaton, bringing with him his lively fan magazine *Novae Terrae*, which later became the official magazine of the SFA, with myself as editor (primarily due to time and circumstances). One of the first things I did was to change the name to *New Worlds* and three issues containing news, articles and fiction were published before the Association went into cold storage at the outbreak of the 1939-45 war.

To celebrate all this outward urging, the first London sf convention was held on a Sunday at The Druids' Hall, not very far from the 'Flat.' At that gathering, apart from celebrities like John Beynon and Professor Low, we met for the first time W. J. Passingham, a freelance writer who contributed fiction and articles regularly to Odhams' *The Passing Show* and *John Bull*. Blackpool author John Russell Fearn delivered a typically optimistic speech anticipating a science fiction boom on television and in the cinema, in the not-too-distant future.

Following the success of the many sf serials published in *The Passing Show*, Passingham had written two serials specially for the paper and became so fascinated by the medium that he had joined the SFA, thereafter becoming my guide, mentor and friend into the world of professional journalism. From this friendly relationship came the first tentative prospects of editing a new British sf magazine.

In October 1939 Bill Passingham approached me with the news that he had interested a publisher in the possibilities of such a magazine and arranged for us to have preliminary talks with one of the directors. The company was The World Says Ltd. with offices in Burleigh Street, Strand, where they published a digest magazine, *The World Says*, a pale image of the then current American *The Readers' Digest* before that magazine was produced here. The publisher was a Canadian named Alfred Greig.

Having discussed the situation—including my misgivings over the inappropriateness of the timing—and shown examples of the US magazines, in particular *Astounding SF*, the matter germinated until January 5th 1940, when I was summoned to a second conference, at which Walter Gillings was also in attendance and we were both invited to give our views. Finance, we were assured, was adequate; paper would be supplied from Canada despite the war; the editor would almost certainly be exempted from war service; and, finally, as part of the company's policy, were we prepared to put money into Company shares?

Both Passingham and I agreed to put up £50 each. Whether this had any bearing on my being offered the editorship, I never knew, but plans were formulated, a salary fixed and my entry into the editorial sanctum arranged for March 1st. The magazine was to be called *New Worlds*, published monthly and distributed by the Atlas Publishing & Distributing Company, who had distributed *Astounding SF* for so many years. Prior to that date I was to prepare the initial issues at home by using as many services of the company's office as I needed. No. 1 should be ready to go to press in March, with two further issues in preparation.

By early February the initial issue was beginning to round out. Harry Turner of Manchester, already producing art work for *Tales Of Wonder*, had submitted some magnificent cover lettering; artist Chester, who had illustrated many of *The Passing Show* serials, had produced a number of cover roughs and three other London artists, introduced by the publisher, had been commissioned for illustrations as soon as the stories had been selected. At one time it had even been hoped that Fortunino Matania might be tempted to paint a cover illustration but either he was not readily available or, more likely, his fees were too high for our budget.

Unfortunately, my records do not show the story lineup for that first issue, all the material being returned to the authors, but I do remember that one novelette was Robert A. Heinlein's 'Lost Legion,' which later appeared under his pseudonym of 'Lyle Monroe' in *Super Science Stories* in USA. Making full use of my membership in the American Fantasy Amateur Press Association—which included such enthusiasts as Donald A. Wollheim, Forrest J. Ackerman and others—I had gained the support of writers like Jack Williamson, L. Sprague de Camp, Robert A. Heinlein, John Victor Peterson, as well as most of the British writers who were becoming established or who were planning upon becoming sf writers. I also intended looking for new writers, in much the same way that T. Stanhope Sprigg had done for Newnes' *Fantasy* but unlike his declared middle-of-the-road policy and Walter's 'straight-forward but simple themes,' I stated to the authors that I wanted to develop a magazine of the calibre of John W. Campbell's *Astounding SF*, a magazine I had read regularly since 1932 and seen through its various stages of development to its then present stage of leading magazine. I wanted a high literary standard, plus mature thought-provoking

stories, feeling that the British reading public would be ready for an advanced sf magazine in view of the preparations that had been made in the previous ten years. On the other hand, I had no intention of deliberately copying *Astounding SF*, feeling that the new magazine would develop its own personality as the right stories came along. The stage looked set for a good initial send-off.

On February 13th the Directors gave a luncheon at the 'Savage Club' to celebrate the completion of the initial work and round out the final plans for launching. Guests included authors Bruce Woodhouse and Bill Passingham, Sir Frederick O'Connor, president of the company, Professor A. M. Low and myself. Here I outlined the policy I proposed setting up. Plans were also discussed for a possible collaboration with the SFA, the suggestions including two separate kinds of membership, one including a year's subscription to *New Worlds* and SFA membership, the other as Associate Membership at 5/- entitling members to all the privileges planned around the magazine—co-operation with cinema Clubs and special tickets for members when sf films were being shown; a yearly free gift to all members of the 'best' sf book of the year; the formation of a sf circulating library; a monthly printed fan magazine covering news about the *genre* in general. All very grandiose considering that we now had a war in Europe!

Two weeks later and just over a week before I was due to take up my official editorial residence, the bubble burst. Ostensibly, it was an internal dispute within the managerial organisation of The World Says Ltd; the Directorate split, funds mysteriously disappeared and wages were not paid and by the end of March the company had gone into voluntary liquidation but before then, in mid-March, there appeared (ironically enough) in *John Bull*, the weekly which had a penchant for sifting out the shifty, an article headed HE IS GRAND—BUT SHADY! wherein Man-about-Town Alfred Greig was reputedly stated to be seeking fame and fortune in the literary world, preferably fortune at the expense of other people, the article inferred. It castigated the system of employees buying shares in companies. 'I have always held,' the writer of the article stated, 'that it is a most objectionable way of raising finance for private companies by taking it from people in return for employment or directorships. Printers are pressing for payment. Even typists find it hard to get their wages and some weeks have to go without. Greig still prates buoyantly of new publications—no doubt I shall embarrass him by urging my readers not to invest any money in the company while he remains at the helm.'

By then it was too late. The company had closed down, Mr. Greig had folded his prospectus along with his tent and departed for his native Canada and the pieces of the proposed magazine were filed away in my desk to await another day. I was richer by a vast amount of experience and poorer by £50 (most of which had been borrowed) but, as we shall see in a later article, the experience and the expense were worthwhile.

John Carnell



Pictured in 1937 are four important figures in British Science Fiction History. Left to right: Arthur C. Clarke, a young fan destined to become a world-famous sf author and populariser of astronautics; Walter Gillings, pioneer sf editor; Ken Chapman, Secretary of the first British Science Fiction Association; Leslie J. Johnson, active in the British Interplanetary Society's formative years.

## THE SAGA OF THE FLAT by William F. Temple

Early in 1938 I was flat-hunting in London. I called on a friend who inhabited the world's tiniest bed-sitter, in Norfolk Square, Paddington. He had an even tinier radio, but no shelf room, so stowed it in a cupboard at the foot of his too-short divan. Hunched on the divan, he regulated the sound volume by opening or closing the cupboard door with his foot. Arthur C. Clarke was ever resourceful.

A blown-up photo of one half of the Moon covered one wall. The other hemisphere covered the opposite wall. Arthur would lie in bed studying the territory he intended to help conquer.

Maybe his love of space travel was boosted by claustrophobia in Paddington. We were both members of the British Interplanetary Society and also the Science-fiction Association, were keen on music and wanted to write pro sf. So I suggested we shared a flat—a spacious one.

We found it at 88 Grays Inn Road. Four rooms, plus etceteras, on two floors, looking out on Grays Inn. Virginia Wolf lived around the corner but never introduced herself. We furnished it, made our own bookshelves for our considerable libraries—I still have all those shelves.

The huge Moon-photo dominated our Den wall, as the Moon itself dominated our thoughts. No. 88 became the HQ of the BIS, which gathered there to discuss ways and means of reaching those lunar Mares. Among the regulars, R. A. Smith, whose fine interplanetary drawings illustrated Arthur's earlier space books. And Val Cleaver, later in charge of Britain's Blue Streak rocket.

Also Maurice Hanson, living in a Bloomsbury bed-sitter, editing Britain's first fanzine, *Nova Terrae*. We invited him to share the Flat. He came, carrying his typewriter. A spool fell off and dragged behind him on 30ft of ribbon. There were trams in Grays Inn Road in those days. He crossed in front of one. It churned over the ribbon. We shut our eyes. We knew he'd never let go of that precious typewriter. He'd rather be dragged along behind the tram. But somehow he escaped en-

tanglement and walked on as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

No. 88 became the editorial offices of *Nova Terrae* too, with Arthur and me as assistant editors. Often in the small hours the three of us would be fighting a temperamental duplicator to produce NT or the BIS Bulletin. Or getting out copy for the *BIS Journal*, which depicted detailed plans of our proposed Moonship, so similar in the event to the Apollo vehicle. (A proud moment when my own tatty copies of that *Journal* were shown on TV that momentous week when the 'giant leap' was made.)

The BIS constructed instruments for its Moonship too. An inertia-governed altimeter which we tested on the Chancery Lane Underground escalators. And a navigational instrument which we demonstrated 100% successfully at the Science Museum to impressed yet patronising (we were cranks, you see) newspaper reporters. In January, 1970, Maurice and I were in the Geological Museum, just a stone's throw from the spot where we'd argued that it was possible to reach the Moon. We gazed at the chunk of Moon rock Neil Armstrong had brought back and voiced the same thought: 'If only we'd had a time machine then and taken those reporters 31 years into the future. . . .'

BIS meetings alternated with Thursday gatherings of sf fans, a tradition still carried on at the nearby *Globe*. Only then they were weekly, not monthly. And our pub was the *Red Bull*, next door. They tended to split into two factions: the teetotallers, headed by Arthur and Maurice, who stayed in the Flat for the meeting; and the others, including John Carnell, Ken Chapman, Frank Arnold, and myself who found liquor in the *Red Bull* heightened discussion. At chucking out time, both parties merged again in the Flat for supper and talk until the last trains went.

One night we returning revellers found the stairs to the Flat barred by a heavy table and other Flat furniture, with Arthur & Co. armed with mops and brooms prepared to keep the drunks out. We stormed the barricade.





Arthur C. Clarke (left) whose writing made countless readers dream of the conquest of space, is seen here with Werner von Braun, the German scientist who was instrumental in translating the dream into reality.

Thanks to some smart rapier play by Carnell and his rolled umbrella, we broke through. After all, the Flat was *ours* too—it was everybody's.

We staged revenge. We sent Arthur out for the fish and chips, and fixed a booby trap over the door. When he entered, a large tin tea-tray fell on his head. He didn't turn a hair—and in those days he *had* hair.

The fish and chip suppers were a ritual. Even the elegant John Wyndham (then John Beynon Harris) would eat them with us out of newspaper. Alas, he departed from us last year but many of the old crew are still around and have become sf authors themselves since: Syd Bounds, Eric Williams, Sam (John Christopher) Youd. Then there were the visitors from Ultima Thule (Liverpool) like John Burke, who does those Pan 'Book of the Film' paperbacks these days, and Dave McIlwain, since known as Charles Eric Maine, whose *THE MIND OF MR. SOAMES* has just been filmed. And a character named Eric Frank Russell. . . .

Merry days, but there was a shadow over them. In my Editorial for the January 1939 *BIS Journal* I wrote: 'Life is overcrowded and uncertain today, and people are inclined to gather the rosebuds while they may under the threat of an approaching storm of war.'

The storm broke. Maurice was conscripted and John

Carnell took over his *NOVA TERRAE*, called it *NEW WORLDS* . . . and began a new era in British sf.

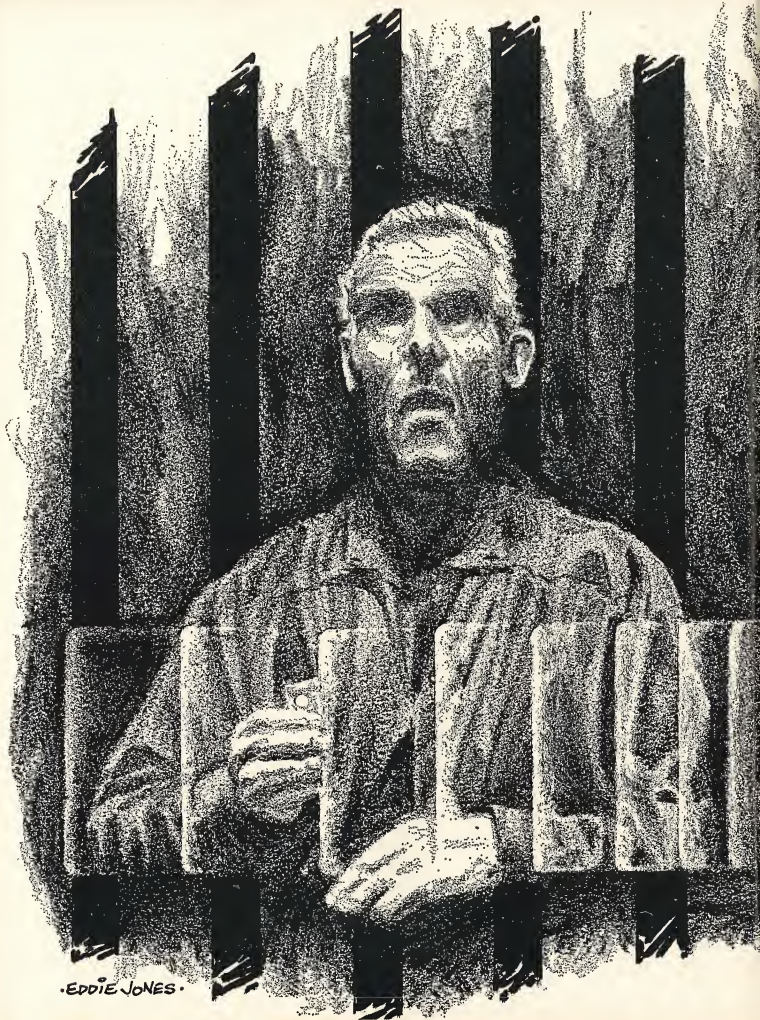
I married in haste but have never repented at leisure. We lived at the Flat. Arthur ignored the war and began writing his first novel, called *RAYMOND*. He'd burn the midnight oil working at it, then burst into our bedroom in the small hours to declaim to us some passage of pure genius he'd just penned. Later it became *AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT*. Later again, *THE CITY AND THE STARS*. He'll never finish re-writing it.

But soon the RAF claimed him, and the Army me, and we had to leave the Flat. Then the bombs came. . . . When I was demobbed I returned to the scene. The Flat had been in the centre of a terrace. Now its inner walls had become outer walls. Everything adjacent had been bombed out of existence, including the pub and the fish and chip shop. The *Red Bull* had gone forever: it was never re-built. And in a sense the Flat has gone forever too—only a flat is there now.

In another sense they will both live as long as we have memories.

William F. Temple

Next month's episode by Walter Gillings tells the incredible story of war-time publishing!



• EDDIE JONES •

# THE BITTER PILL

## A. Bertram Chandler

It had been a bad day in the office.

Bryson, the Branch Manager, was away sick—and Bryson was one of those men who never take subordinates into their confidence. In theory Paul Clayton, the Chief Clerk, was second in command—but in practice he was, and he knew it, no more than a senior clerk. He had been passed over so many times. Only two weeks ago Taylor, Branch Manager at Port Macdonald, regarded as the lowest rung of the Company's ladder, had been promoted to the much more important Phillipville Branch Office, and young Deems, a mere Assistant Accountant at Head Office, had been sent to take Taylor's place. In both years and Company seniority Taylor and Deems were junior to Clayton.

So Paul Clayton sat in the chair behind the Branch Manager's desk, in the Branch Manager's private office, knowing that he did not belong there, that he never would belong there. He tried to get down to some paper work—his own paper work—sorting out the loading times, gross and net, and tonnage rates of the Company's freighter, *Dankara*. The computerised version was, of course, already to hand—but the computer failed to make allowances for the sort of delays attributable to mere human inefficiency or, as was becoming more and more the case, sheer bloody mindedness. But it seemed that every time he started to tot up a column of figures the telephone would buzz insistently.

First of all it was Williams, Export Manager of Iron & Steel Products Incorporated, whose face appeared in the little screen. Clayton did not like Williams, a beefy, blustering man, a bully when he knew that he could get away with it, and Williams despised Clayton.

'Where's Bryson?' he demanded.

'Taking a sicky,' replied Clayton shortly.

'Oh, I suppose you'll do. Look, Clayton, about this shipment to Wellington. We've had the bloody stuff containerised and packaged for all of a bloody week. Where's the bloody ship you promised us?'

'*Dansilva*? She's been stuck in Newfort with main engine trouble. But she should be here tomorrow afternoon.'

'She'd bloody better be. It's bloody time you people scrapped the worst of your antique rustbuckets and got some decent tonnage. I needn't tell you that the County Line'd be glad of our custom, they'd just love to get one foot inside the door of your precious trans-Tasman trade! And if the Dan bloody Steamship Company can't give us service...' On those words Williams hung up abruptly.

Then it was the Chief Officer of *Dantallis*, an overly excitable young man, flushed with anger, even to his shaven scalp, calling to say that he was getting no co-operation at all from the Supervisor of Port Keira Stevedores, and that his carefully worked out stowage was being *ruined*. And then it was the Manager of Port Keira Stevedores, complaining that his Supervisor had been insulted by the Chief Officer of the ship...

At this juncture Captain Starr, Master of *Dantallis*, walked in.

**D.I.S. SENIOR CITIZEN**

Nº  
672505



Name PAUL CLAYTON  
Address 47-27 TOWER 9  
PORT KEIRA - N.S.W. 4261  
D of B 7-4-1953  
Occ. CHIEF CLERK-DAN  
Status MARRIED  
Sig. Paul Clayton

WARNING: THIS CARD MUST BE CARRIED WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES. ANY  
FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THIS INSTRUCTION WILL RESULT IN  
THE IMPOSITION OF SEVERE PENALTIES - DEPT. OF INFORMATION



'Hello, Paul. What are you doing in the chair?'

'Mr. Bryson's off sick, Captain.'

'It's an ill wind. Ha, ha.' The shipmaster's teeth gleamed whitely against his dark beard and moustache, his beautifully brushed shoulder-length hair gleamed as it quivered when he laughed.

Clayton looked up at him with envy. The Captain was in the same age group as himself, but the years had treated him kindly, very kindly. He, Clayton, was weedy, but with the beginnings of a paunch. His hair, although of respectable length, was brittle and straggling, and it was becoming increasingly hard to brush it to hide the monkish tonsure. His beard and moustache were rather more grey than sandy.

'Your Chief Officer, Captain. He's been having words with Captain Dalby, the P.K.S. Supervisor . . .'

'He's *you*-ng, Paul, so he *must* be right. What was it we used to say when we were his age? Never trust anybody over thirty. Youth must be served, in this Brave New World of ours, and well we know it.'

'And well I know it. It's all very well for you, Captain Starr. You still have your rank, your authority. And you, as well as commissioned and non-commissioned officers of the Armed Forces, are Exempt . . .'

Starr laughed again. 'Would you believe it, Paul? Our bloody silly Guild is trying to get the Exemption lifted as far as we're concerned. Say that it makes Second Class Citizens of us . . .' He consulted his watch. 'The sun's well over the yardarm . . .'

'Is it? It was raining the last time I looked.'

'It still is. But you know what I mean.'

Clayton waved a despairing hand at his littered desk. 'I can't spare the time . . .' Then, 'Damn it, I can. After all, it *is* my birthday.'

'Many happy returns, Paul. Had your present from our benevolent Lords and Masters yet?'

'It's probably waiting for me at home.' He laughed. 'The proof of my maturity. Of *Their* implicit trust in me. Blah. Blah.' He got up, reached for and shrugged into his weatherproof. He said, 'Lucky I brought it with me. Fine, dry weather was scheduled for today. But I ceased trusting *Them* years ago.'

'Careful,' warned Starr.

As they passed through the outer office the shaven-headed junior clerks, the micro-skirted girls, looked up at the two older men coldly.

Jenny, the barmaid, was plumply comfortable. Unlike the younger girls, she wore a blouse, but it was transparent rather than translucent. There was a suspicion of sag to her full breasts, but no more than a suspicion. She smiled expansively when Starr told her, 'Drinks on the house, Jenny. It's Paul's birthday.'

'Can't do that, Captain. But I'll do me best with the collars on your beers . . . Here you are, now, gentlemen—the heads personally guaranteed to be no more than three molecules thick!'

Starr and Clayton sipped from their glasses.

'So it's yer birthday, dearie . . .' went on Jenny. '*The birthday?*'

'Yes.'

She shrugged, and her breasts jiggled enticingly.

'Never mind, ducks. You'll get over it. I did.'

'You're kidding us, Jenny,' Starr told her.

'I'm not, Captain. I'll never see forty five again. And I don't mind telling you that it was a bit of a shock to the old system when I got me present from *Them*. But I learned to live with it—just as we've learned to live with so many things.' She was warming up. 'Automation, for one. Remember how places like this were going to be fully automated? Half-dollar-in-the-slot machines, put in yer money and press the right button and there's yer beer, whisky, plonk or whatever. But I could'a told 'em it'd never work. Too impersonal. Did you know that they're advertising for barmaids for the hotels in Lunar City?'

'Are they? Have you applied, Jenny?' asked Starr.

'Too right I have, Captain. But I'm too old, they tell me. A pity. That Moon gravity'd do wonders for me figure.'

'It's very nice the way it is now. Have you heard me complaining?'

'I have to be getting back,' announced Clayton.

'Why, Paul?'

'I've a platful, Captain. All the things that I should have done yesterday, and now all Mr. Bryson's work on top of it.'

'Oh, well. If you insist. I'll have one more and get back to my ship and see what sort of balls my bald-headed boy wonder has been making of things.'

It had been a bad day in the office.

Iron & Steel Products Incorporated, the Chief Officer of *Dantallis*, the Manager of Port Keira Stevedores, the Traffic Manager of Head Office, the Port Keira Harbourmaster . . . It seemed that never had the little screen of the telephone ceased to present the picture of some bad-tempered individual. The worst of it all was having to cope with it without any real authority.

Clayton stuck by his desk until 1715 hours, at which time all the office staff were well on their way home. He made some attempt at assembling the paper work that he had been trying to do into some sort of order. He put on his weatherproof—it was still raining—locked up and walked to the hovercoach terminal. This was crowded as usual—watersiders, office workers, shop assistants. As usual segregation, self-imposed, was setting in. On one side of the waiting hall were the young, the shaven-headed boys, the girls in their skirts that left nothing to the imagination, and on the other side were the so-called 'oldies'. Until today Clayton had always rather resented being put into this category . . . Well, today was different.

He stood there among his peers, the middle-aged men and women who should, by this time, have achieved something—but who had, in actuality, achieved nothing. He stood there among the hasbeens, the neverweres,



shivering a little in the damp, chill atmosphere, smoking his savourless denicotinised cigarette. He looked with a certain envy at the young in their bright, form-fitting and form-displaying clothing—and winced as one of them, his own junior clerk, fed a coin into the jukebox. This slow, saccharine-sweet muck was not music! Then the hovercoach was there, whining impatiently, seeming to jounce up and down in its imitation leather skirts as it waited for its passengers to board.

The oldies were—of course—the last to embark. By the time that Clayton trudged up the ramp every seat had been taken. Every seat? He even had to share a strap with a sour-featured woman who jerked away, as though an indecent proposition were being made, every time that his hand touched hers. Somebody trampled on his feet, ruining the shine of his shoes. The ferrule of an umbrella jabbed him painfully in the side. And all the time there was the earbashing of advertising—*Smoke Timbales—the cigarette for the young and the young in heart, guaranteed non-carcinogenic! Drink Frosty-Flip, the youthful soft drink! Girls! Encase your legs in Regina Nudi-Hose! Wear a Regina Nudi-Bral Crunchi-Bites, the In Party Food! Start the day with Regulax! More-Than-Instant Syn-Coffee! Tune to Station FAX for the News before it happens! Vita-Munch, Breakfast, Dinner, Tea or Lunch! Vita, Vita, Vita-Munch! Hoyida, Hoyida, Hoyida...Power between your legs, under your hands! Do the Ton without trouble! Have fun, do the Ton! Birds love it—and love you when you do! The Ton, the Ton, the Ton! Pepperil's Pills! Never a pregnancy in a peck! Nofuzz, Nofuzz, Nofuzz—the young man's depilatory! Mary Jane, the young man's smoke! Levisons—the young man's jeans! Read BRUTE, the young man's magazine! Use Vitaflex, for...*

The hovercoach slowed to a halt.

'...have fun with Vitaflex...'

Clayton pushed his way through the crowd towards the exit door.

'...be young, have fun, with...'

As usual, the coach driver had failed to align the door properly with the ramp.

'Vitaflex, for the young!'

As usual, Clayton had to jump. The surface of the ramp was slippery with the rain. He lost his footing, fell to his knees. He heard ironical laughter from the young men and women aboard the hovercoach. And then the thing was on its way, its side-blast sending him slithering and falling again. When he got to his feet he realised that the palms of both hands were skinned and painful, that the right knee of his slacks was torn and that his right knee was bleeding.

It was still a bad day.

It was an uphill walk from the hovercoach stop to the block in which he lived, a ferro-concrete tower, harsh and ugly in its bush setting. The rain was cold on his face, seeped down inside the collar of his weatherproof. His shoes were starting to squelch, and he wondered if the shoddy material would hold out until he got home.

When he pushed through the swing doors into the hallway he saw that Mrs. Drummond, who had an apartment on the same floor as himself, was waiting for the elevator. She smiled at him, her dentures too white and even in her weathered face.

'Good evening, Mr. Clayton. Hasn't it been a shocking day!'

'It has,' he agreed morosely.

She went on, 'I hope you don't think I'm nosey, but I saw the postman at your door when I left to do my shopping. Special Delivery, it was, and all sorts of seals on the envelope. Mrs. Clayton had to sign for it...'

'Oh, yes? Well, here's our lift.'

'And about time.' She looked at him with avid curiosity. 'Did I hear that today was your birthday, Mr. Clayton? Your forty-fifth birthday?'

Paul Clayton let her precede him into the car. He said, as he pressed the fourth floor button, 'I don't think that you could have heard it, Mrs. Drummond.'

She cackled. 'Perhaps I didn't. But you can't mistake those envelopes, can you? I always remember the nasty turn it gave me when Mr. Drummond, may he rest in peace, got his. But the way things were with him I thought it was for the best, and I'll say this for him, he left me well provided for...'

'Here is our floor.' He stood aside to let the woman out first.

'Thank you, Mr. Clayton. And give my regards to Mrs. Clayton, will you? I haven't seen her lately. And tell her if she wants any help, anybody to talk to, I'm almost always in. And I know what it's like...'

'Good evening, Mrs. Drummond.'

'Good evening, Mr. Clayton.'

Clayton let himself into his apartment. Janine was sitting with her back to the door, watching *Blue Mountains* on the tridi. Normally she had no time for this type of entertainment, hated a series with its two-dimensional (even though the screen was three-dimensional) characters forever tangling and untangling themselves. But she did not look around. She said, in a barely audible voice, 'It's come.'

'I know,' replied Clayton. He could see *it* there on the mantelpiece, alongside the birthday card—THERE'S MANY A GOOD TUNE PLAYED ON AN OLD FIDDLE!—that she had given him that very morning. *It* was a big, bulky envelope, heavily sealed.

He said, 'I'd like to throw it into the incinerator.'

She got up then, and stood facing him. She was younger than he, but her face was marked with years of disappointment, of drab living. Her once-lustrous blonde hair was dull, and her make-up, although too heavy, could not hide the lines around her mouth and faded blue eyes. 'You can't, Paul. You mustn't. You know that *They* can make a check at any time, and if you haven't got *it* on you...'

'Oh, all right. All right. I've reached the age of emotional maturity. *They* think I'm trustworthy. I wish to Christ that the Company thought the same!' He took the envelope from the mantelpiece, tried to tear it open.

It was tough, resisted all his efforts. He muttered a curse, went through to the little kitchenette, found a sharp knife, slit the flap. He pulled out a letter, and a new Identity Card encased in clear plastic, in the exact centre of which, in its tough pouch, was a little white pill. As for the rest of it—there was his photograph, his usual signature (two weeks ago he had reported to the Security Centre to supply these), his name, address, date of birth, occupation and marital status. Also, in red block capitals that seemed to glow, was the admonition: **WARNING! THIS CARD MUST BE CARRIED WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES. ANY FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THIS INSTRUCTION WILL RESULT IN THE IMPOSITION OF SEVERE PENALTIES.**

He dropped the card on to the kitchen table, picked up the letter. It was—of course—from the Department of Internal Security. *Dear Sir, Enclosed herewith please find your Senior Citizen's Identity Card. Within three days of the receipt of this Document you will report to your Local Security Centre to surrender your Citizen's Identity Card. Failure to do so within the stipulated time will incur demerits.*

As a Senior Citizen you are now a privileged member of the Community, with Rights denied to those who are your juniors. One of these Rights is a most important one, the Right of Termination, granted only to those deemed sufficiently mature to be worthy of holding it.

A small pill is incorporated in your Identity Card. Should you wish, after careful consideration, to use it, pull the black tab sharply, releasing the pellet. Water or other fluid may be used as an aid to swallowing it but, as the surface has a glazed coating, this should not be necessary.

The pill consists of Euthanol in a concentrated form, and swift, painless death will ensue within 2.3 seconds of ingestion.

Although this is the most important of your new privileges there are others, listed hereunder:

- 1) The holder of a Senior Citizen's Identity Card shall, on production of this document, be entitled to travel on State-owned and -operated transport at  $\frac{3}{4}$  normal fare on all days excepting Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays, and between the hours of 0930 and 1600.
- 2) The Holder of a Senior Citizen's Identity Card shall, on production of this document, be entitled to enter any State-owned and -operated place of entertainment at  $\frac{3}{4}$  normal admission price on all days excepting Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays, and between the hours of 0930 and 1600.
- 3) The Holder of a Senior Citizen's Identity Card shall, on production of this document, be entitled to purchase any of the goods listed hereunder, either from State-owned and -operated emporia or from privately-owned and -operated emporia at 90% of the standard retail price:
  - 1) Aardvark Cigarettes
  - 2) Ashervynil Wall Tiles

### 3) Blessomal Relaxants . . .

The catalogue was a long one, but nothing in it, and nothing in the entire document but that first, unnumbered clause, was of any real importance. The State, in its omnipotent wisdom, had given very little apart from that initial privilege. For example, all the products listed were very poorly selling lines. Who, in his right senses, would drink Old Bushranger Whisky, even with a 10% reduction in price? It would be neither as fast nor as painless as Euthanol—but it would be, in the not-so-long run, just as certain . . .

Clayton walked back into the living room carrying the card. He tried to grin. 'I've got it, but I don't *have* to use it—any more than I have to use the kitchen knife on myself. But it's there. It's always there. It's been there for years.'

'But it's the *principle* of it,' she insisted. 'We decided on that when we started discussing it. We agreed that it was *wrong* that the State should countenance—encourage, even—suicide.'

He said, 'I've been thinking about it—more so than you, perhaps. And now it's happened, the new Identity Card with the built-in pill, it's not so bad.' He went on after a pause. 'After all, there've been cultures in which suicide has been publicly approved. The Japanese, for instance. *Hari kari* . . .'

'Yes, Paul. Yes. But *hari kari* wasn't an easy way out. This pill is too damned easy. Look at the Drummonds.'

'From what I remember of old Drummond, he'd probably have done away with himself in any case. And with that wife of his, who could blame him?'

'You don't get it. Mr. Drummond would have been no more capable of using a knife, or of wading out into the sea and then swimming out to past the limit of his strength, than you would. You're scared of pain . . .'

'No one likes it, unless he's a masochist.'

'Don't avoid the issue. I know you, Paul. I should, after all these years. You're timid, you're weak, you're scared. Why do you think that you've never got any higher than Chief Clerk in a not very important Branch, and never will? It's not the Company's fault, you know. It's your fault, but you won't admit it. And what about me? Do you think that I like being tied to a failure?'

'I'm not a failure.'

'You're not a success, that's for certain. When I think of whom I could have married . . . Ted Harmon—he's Chief Salesman now, for Hoyida. He can afford a house for his wife, not a damned hutch in a damned concrete rabbit warren. They can afford *meat* every day of the week if they feel like it! And his clothes . . . Real nylon underwear, not that damned shoddy paper that falls to pieces after the third wash!'

'His clothes? His underwear? How do you know?'

'Let go of my arm! You're hurting me!'

'How do you know so much about Ted Harmon?'

'Let go of my arm, I say!'

'All right!' He almost threw her from him. 'Now, out with it! Or I'll beat it out of you. What's with you and that bastard Harmon?'

'Brave, aren't you? Aren't you brave, when you have only a woman to deal with! And you a man who daren't say Boo to the office boy! At least Ted Harmon's a real man. That's how he's got where he is!'

He stared at her. In her temper much of her lost beauty had returned. She was desirable—and the thought of her naked desirability writhing in the arms of the gross Harmon was too much. He raised his arm, his fist clenched.

'Go on!' she taunted. 'Hit me! Show me what a big man you are!'

He let his arm fall to his side. In a black flood there washed over him the accumulated futility of the years. What good would it do to strike Janine? What good would anything do—*now*? Other men, after a hard day at the office, returned home to a warm welcome. Once, he could barely remember, it had been that way with him. But not any longer. Not for years. Recriminations were more usual than caresses.

He looked down at the card where it had fallen on the carpet. *Why not?* he asked himself silently. *Why the hell not? It's there to be used.* He squatted clumsily, picked up the plastic oblong. His fingers found the black tab. He pulled it viciously, and a circle of transparent material came away, and the little pill rolled out on to the floor. He reached for it—and then his hand was kicked away, bruising his fingers, and her sharp heel was grinding viciously down on the tiny sphere, shattering it, powdering it, until only a smear of pale dust remained, inextricably embedded among the coarse fibres.

'No,' she was saying. 'No. NO.'

He got somehow to his feet, put his arms about her. She fell heavily against him.

'Paul,' she whispered. 'Paul... I didn't mean everything I said. I didn't, darling. I didn't...' She managed a shaky little laugh. 'All we have is each other, and we have to make the best of what we've got...'

The following morning Clayton felt a little better, but not much. The release of tensions had helped him, and had helped Janine—but still there was that nagging doubt at the back of his mind. *How had she known the details of Harmon's underwear?* Of course, a man in his financial position could well afford underclothing of real synthetics rather than flimsy, shoddy paper... Even so...

He spoke hardly at all as he bolted his breakfast of Seafakes and reconstituted milk, his mug of Syncaff. He pecked Janine perfunctorily on the cheek as he let himself out of the apartment. Before taking the lift to ground level he checked to make sure that the new Identity Card was in his inside breast pocket. It was. He supposed that he would have to do something about getting the lethal pill replaced; no doubt there would be innumerable forms to fill in and all the rest of it.

The day's weather was actually as forecast. The morning was fine, although the southerly breeze was too chilly for outdoor comfort. Still, he enjoyed the walk

from the apartment building to the hoverbus stop. It was possible, if one shut one's eyes and used one's imagination, to visualise what this locality must have been like before the rash of steel and glass and concrete spread inwards from the coastal fringe. There was even a bird singing—discordantly, raucously, but it was a *natural* noise—a lone kookaburra that lingered on whilst all its mates had fled to the diminishing Inland from encroaching Man.

The hoverbus was on time, for a change. By some fantastic streak of good luck it was not overcrowded. Best of all, perhaps, its public address system seemed to have broken down. Clayton began to feel almost happy. He had a seat, his ears were not assailed by advertisements for products that he had no intention of ever buying, and the sun was shining. Even the youngies in the coach seemed to be in a subdued mood, rarely raising their voices above normal conversational level. It was a pleasant ride.

His feeling of well-being did not last for long.

At the Port Keira terminal an Identity Card check was being held. Two burly Security Police, their calling obvious despite their civilian clothing, stopped each passenger as he approached the exit, demanded a show of documents. Wildly Clayton thought of leaving the building by some alternative way, but the gate was shut across the ramp by which the coach had entered, and the windows in the walls were too high and were, in any case, shut. Too, such action on his part would not escape notice, and the SPs were armed.

He hung back, rehearsing in his mind what he would say, what he could say. At last he could delay no longer; he was the only unchecked passenger and the policemen were looking at him with growing suspicion. He walked towards them with a confidence that he did not feel.

'Takin' yer time, ain't yer, mate?' growled one of the men. 'Let's see yer papers—or have yer left 'em at home?'

'No, officer. They're here. Here they are.'

The Security Policeman snatched the card from Clayton's hand. He stared at it. Then—'Hey, Bill, take a gander at this! This joker's had his card less'n a day, an' already he's broken Regulation 13B!' He turned back to Clayton, asked not unkindly, 'Wife trouble, clobber?'

'I really don't see how that's any concern of yours...'

The man's mood changed in a flash. '*Everything's* our concern, as you'll soon find out. Pill-less wonders especially.' He thrust the card into his pocket, then grabbed Clayton's right arm. His grip was like iron. 'You're takin' a ride with us, mister—an' unless you watch yerself it'll be a one-way ride!'

'But... I have to get to work... My office... My wife...'

'They'll be notified soon enough. Come on, now!'

Foolishly Clayton tried to break free. The agony, as his arm was jerked up behind his back, was excruciating. Whimpering a little, he allowed himself to be hustled into the police car.

Even in this day and age the majority of people managed to keep out of police custody. Imprisonment was a new experience to Clayton. It was something that happened to others, never to oneself. After the steel door had clanged shut on him he collapsed on to the hard bunk, sat huddled with his head in his hands. This was all a mistake, a dreadful mistake. As soon as the authorities realised who he was, the Chief Clerk—no, the Acting Branch Manager—of the Dan Line he would be released. Probably there would be a fine of some kind for the loss of the pill from his Identity Card, but never a prison sentence, never ...

*What could They do to him? What would They do? What had happened to Hawkins, in Head Office, shortly after he had passed his forty-fifth birthday? What had happened to Hawkins? Nobody seemed to know, but he wasn't around any more.*

The time dragged. Clayton's frequent inspection of his watch made it drag all the more slowly. He got up and tried to pace up and down—but in a cubicle 7 x 7 x 7 the effort was ludicrous. There was no window to look out of, the only light came from a bulb set behind thick glass in the ceiling. Floor and walls were of hard, featureless plastic. In one place somebody had tried to scratch something on it—name? date? blasphemy or obscenity?—but had given up.

Time dragged. Now and again there would be muffled footsteps in the corridor outside the cell, and each time Clayton would stiffen with a wild hope. Was it Janine? Was it somebody from the office? Was it some high ranking police officer with an order for his release? And each time that the footsteps passed and faded he would slump back into despair.

Then the door rattled open. A uniformed warder stood there, accompanied by another man, in what could only be convict's clothing, pushing a trolley. 'Tucker,' announced the warder, standing to one side. 'Catch, mate!' said the convict, throwing two packages in the general direction of Clayton, who missed them both. The door clanged shut.

Slowly Clayton picked his meal up from the floor. He wasn't hungry, but it was something to do. There was a tetrahedral container of lukewarm fluid which, luckily, had not burst. There was a pack of sandwiches. The fluid was tea, weak and unsweetened. The bread of the sandwiches was dry, and the filling was Soyjoy, a spread that he had never liked, despite its highly nutritional qualities. But there was nothing else, and eating the unappetising sandwiches passed the time, took his mind—but briefly—off his predicament.

There was another meal, of similar character, four hours later. After this Clayton made use of the covered bucket that he found under the bunk. Two hours after this second meal the light, without warning, went out. Only the thin thread of light visible around the door saved the prisoner from the horrifying conviction that he had suddenly gone blind.

It was a long night, and cold, and the single, thin blanket was almost useless. Even had the bed been

luxurious Clayton would have been unable to sleep. For the first time in his rather sheltered life, with its womb to tomb Welfare State security, he was really frightened.

At last it was morning, and there was a bowl of some thin, flavourless gruel thrust at him by the escorted trusty. After he had finished it he was taken by two warders to the toilets, where he emptied his malodorous bucket and was allowed a hasty wash in cold water. He was returned briefly to his cell, but was given hardly enough time to fold his blanket. He had just completed this minor task when the door opened to admit two guards.

'Come on!' growled the older and tougher-looking of the pair. 'We haven't all day!'

'Am ... Am I being released?'

'That'll be the sunny Friday!' guffawed the man. 'Come on—or do we have to drag yer?'

'Where are you taking me?'

'Never your mind.'

'But ... But I've done nothing ...'

'Tell that to the Beak.'

The warder advanced threateningly on Clayton. His hands looked as huge and brutal as the rest of him. Clayton decided to go quietly.

How far was it from the cell block to the room to which he was taken? He never knew, but it seemed like miles, a long, long walk through a labyrinth of featureless, drab, artificially lit corridors. The guards talked between themselves, ignored him save for an occasional shove or prod. He soon learned that nothing was to be gained by asking them questions.

Then, at the end of a passageway, they came to a door on which, in black lettering, were the words SENIOR MAGISTRATE. The leading guard rapped smartly on this, then opened it. The other man pushed Clayton through the entrance, so violently that he stumbled and almost fell.

Sitting behind a desk was the magistrate. He was young, with the shaven head affected by his age group. He looked at Clayton through cold, blue eyes. His pale, plump, smooth face was expressionless. Before him was a collection of documents—Clayton's old identity card, his new one, a Manila folder. He asked, 'Is this the man?'

'Yes, Your Honour,' replied the elder of the two officers.

'H'm. Yes. Well.' Pudgy hands played with the papers.

'Your Honour,' cried Clayton, 'don't I get to see a lawyer, a psychologist?'

'Shaddup!' barked the senior guard. 'Talk when you're talked to!'

The magistrate raised an admonitory hand. 'I will allow the question. For your information, Paul Clayton, I am a psychologist. Also, I am a lawyer. Also, I am judge, jury and—although this duty I delegate—executioner. H'm. Yes.

'You were, perhaps, expecting a formal trial—but in



a case such as yours no trial is necessary. The evidence, the irrefutable evidence, is here.' A thick finger pushed the Senior Citizen's card, with its damning, empty pouch, across the desk. 'You have abused the trust placed in you by the State, shown yourself an unworthy recipient of the privileges accorded to a Senior Citizen. You stand before me self-condemned ...'

'I can explain, Your Honour ...'

'Very well. Explain.'

'It was like this ...' began Clayton, then fell silent. How could he clear himself without incriminating Janine? *He was going to use the Pill, but my wife knocked it out of my hand and then stamped on it and ground it into the carpet ...* What would They do to her?

'Go on, Clayton.'

'It ... It was an accident ...'

The pale, plump face showed expression at last—acute boredom. 'That's what you all say, all of you gutless wonders who decide to avail yourselves of the price-less boon that the State has conferred upon you, then haven't the nerve to go through with it. I know your type, Clayton. It's a common one. Too common. H'm. Yes.'

'You are hereby found guilty of Lack of Moral Fibre, and sentenced to One Year's Corrective Detention.'

'But, Your Honour! My job! My wife!'

'Your employers and your spouse will be notified. I doubt that either will miss you. Guards, take him away!'

They took him away.

They took him away—first of all through a long corridor, at the end of which he was hustled into a vehicle that was, as far as he was concerned, a windowless cell on wheels. He was allowed no more than a glimpse of daylight and of a grim, grey prison yard. At the end of the long ride, he was dragged roughly from the van out into another yard, marched to a reception room where he was made to strip and where all his personal possessions, such as they were, were taken from him. He was given a pair of rough shoes, which were too large, a pair of coarse, grey socks, which stretched to fit his feet, and a suit of grey coveralls, which were too small. After this he was taken to a large dormitory, with sixty beds, the door of which was locked behind him decisively.

He stood there blinking bewilderedly.

'Welcome!' somebody called sardonically. 'Welcome, Number 49!'

'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!' solemnly intoned another man.

Clayton looked at his prisonmates with both curiosity and trepidation. There were forty-eight of them. All of them were dressed as he was, each of them seemed to be in the same age group, late or middle forties. They returned his stare. It seemed to him that there was derision on each bearded face—but there was, too, a camaraderie.

'What's your name?' one of the men asked.

'Clayton,' he muttered. 'Paul Clayton ...'

'We've already got a Paul,' said the man, 'and I'm

him. You'd better be Clay. Suit you?'

'Yes, it suits,' thought Clayton. In the space of a few hours he had been stripped of his standing, his identity, reduced to the primordial clay.

He asked, 'What happens now? How does this corrective detention work out?'

Paul laughed, his big teeth yellow and mottled in his untidy pepper-and-salt beard. 'So far, Clay, it's just detention. We get our meals—such as they are—and our exercise—such as it is. Most of the guards are in our age group, and there's a certain feeling of *There but for the grace of God go I*. All in all, they're not a bad bunch of bastards. But when there are sixty of us—that, they tell us, is when we begin to learn the facts of life.'

'What happens then?'

'We're shipped out of here.'

'Where?'

'That, brother, is the sixty four dollar question. There've been rumours that it's to Hard Labour on the Moon, but I'm afraid that it is only rumours ...'

'Afraid?'

'Yeah. When I was a kid I used to read a lot of science fiction—and that was just before the first Moon landing. I'd have sold my soul to walk on the Moon myself, one day. I guess I still would ...'

'Some say that it'll be the submarine farms,' contributed another man.

'Not on your sweet life,' Paul told him. 'Glamour jobs like that are for the young, not for old hasbeens like us.'

'Somebody must know,' insisted Clayton.

'Sure. Somebody must know—but he just ain't telling.' He shrugged philosophically. 'Oh, well, comes the sixtieth victim and we'll find out.'

Came the sixtieth victim, and they found out.

It was all of a month before the tally was filled—thirty days that, to Clayton's surprise, did not pass at all unpleasantly. Discipline was lax, the food was hardly less palatable than that which he had eaten in his own home, the company was good; there were men there from all walks of life. Paul had been a schoolmaster, there were quite a few clerks, and there were two men who had been managers of State-owned factories. There were labourers and shop assistants, salesmen and engineers. Each of them, like Clayton, had experienced his moment of temptation, each of them had changed his mind—or had his mind changed for him. Most of them were philosophical about their fate—after all, what was a year, even though this period of Corrective Detention would not commence until they were taken to the place where the actual sentence would be served? 'It's a year away from the Rat Race,' said Paul. 'It's a year to get ourselves sorted out ...'

'And what about our wives?' asked Clayton.

'They'll manage,' the schoolmaster said cynically. 'They managed all right before the SPs pounced on us—at least, mine did—and they'll manage all right now ...'

Came the sixtieth victim, the sixtieth prisoner, a frail

little man who was given barely time to introduce himself before the guards erupted into a frenzy of activity. The prisoners were chivvied out of their dormitory, into the yard, where a fleet of windowless vans was waiting. They rode, standing, for a long time in darkness—and when, at last, the doors opened to let them out it was on to a vast, twilight airfield. They were given no time to relieve themselves, which was a matter of great urgency for most of them, which would have been too late for a substantial minority. A troop of uniformed officers—unlike the guards at the prison these were all young men—made them line up in rough formation and then marched them to a huge transport. Clayton heard one of them mutter disgustedly to his mate, ‘These *stinking* old bastards!’ And so would you *stink*, he thought, if...

‘Step on it, grand-dad! We haven’t all bloody night!’ The sharp point of a bayonet pricked Clayton’s buttock.

He stepped on it, and stumbled up the ramp to the aircraft’s entry port. He groped his way to a hard bucket seat, collapsed into it. Soon the other prisoners and the guards were in their places. One of these latter ordered, ‘Fasten seatbelts!’ adding, ‘It’s no skin off my nose if you don’t, and break your bloody necks!’

Jet engines whined into life. The plane leaped skyward. Clayton tried to pull aside the curtain that covered his window, cried out as a fist smashed his hand away from the window. ‘Naughty, naughty grand-dad. Peeping’s not allowed!’ And the officious guard snarled to somebody else, ‘And where the hell do you think you’re going, you miserable old bastard?’

‘To the toilet,’ came the reply, in Paul’s voice.

‘Not bloody likely you’re not. Not until you ask me nicely.’

‘May I go to the toilet?’

‘Say “sir”.’

Clayton could see the schoolmaster’s face in the dim lighting. He saw for the first time, the essential arrogance of the man—an arrogance that had been revived by this last, petty humiliation. He watched, in a fascinated horror, Paul’s hands fumbling with the fly-buttons of his coveralls as he said, too calmly, ‘I warn you. It’s urgent.’

‘Just do it, grand-dad. Just do it, that’s all.’

‘*You!*’ This was a fresh voice, mature, authoritative. ‘Stand aside and allow the passenger to get aft!’

‘What’s it to you?’

‘Plenty. I’m the captain of this aircraft, and I don’t want her stunk out while you play your silly games. Stand aside. That’s an order!’

The pilot bulked big in the aisle, and the size of him was more than physical. Paul slipped past the guard, who ignored him, who said, ‘Just wait until I get my hands on you.’

‘You never will, sonny. There are some professions, and mine is one of ‘em, where experience is regarded as important, whose members don’t get that marvellous forty-fifth birthday present.’ He addressed the prisoners. ‘As long as we’re airborne, you’re all fare-paying passengers as far as I’m concerned.’ He grinned sardonically.

‘After all, somebody paid your fares, and it wasn’t young Fatso here.’

‘... I’ll report you.’

‘Report me for *what*? Don’t forget that I have to put in *my* report on the trip.’ He addressed the prisoners again. ‘A good evening to you, gentlemen. If you have any more trouble with your custodians, just yell. My First Officer, even though he is rather young, is quite capable of flying this crate while I get things sorted out.’

The rest of the flight was uneventful.

They landed somewhere in the desert, the big ship settling gently on her downward directed jets. When they were herded out of the aircraft the dust was still thick in the air, stinging their eyes, clogging their mouths and noses. Visibility slowly improved as they were marched over the sand, through clumps of spiky grass that clutched at their trouser legs, to a huddle of long, low buildings. Clayton stopped and turned to look as he heard the roar of the plane’s engines as it lifted off, but one of the guards yelped at him viciously, and he thought better of it. But he was able to direct his glance upwards at the sky as he walked; the stars were brighter and more numerous than he had ever seen them before in his life, and the gulfs between them deeper and blacker. He shivered—and it was not only the bitterly cold night air that induced this reaction.

The air inside the hall into which they were taken was not warm, but the chill was off it. The lighting was harsh and hurt the eyes. Around the walls, facing inwards, stood the guards, a full two dozen of them, and each was armed with a bayoneted rifle, each had a holstered pistol at his belt. They were young, all of them—young and tough and pitiless. The man sitting at the desk was young, too. In his mind Clayton referred to him as an overfed lout—and knew that to voice his thoughts would be an unpleasant way of committing suicide.

This man, his voice unpleasantly nasal, spoke into a microphone. ‘So yer here—an’ a sorrier shower o’ bastards I never seen. Before yer go ter yer fleabags there’s a few things I have ter tell yer. First—you ain’t got no names no longer. When yer file through that door at the far end pick up yer badges, pin ‘em onto yerselves. Each badge has a number. That number’ll be *you*. Go on walkin’ till yer come ter J Dormitory. Each bunk has a number, same as on yer badges. Ten minutes is all yer get ter tuck yerselves in, then it’s Lights Out. Reveille’s at 0530 hours tomorrow—an’ every tomorrow when you’re here. Breakfast at six, ‘cept on Sunday, when you has yer weekly shower. Then it’s at 0630. Turn to at seven, weekdays an’ Sundays. Meals during the day as an’ when you get ‘em. Knock-off time—‘pends on how much yer’ve done.’ He paused. ‘Oh, one more thing. The badge you get’s like the Cards you had. Got a Pill sealed into it. Any o’ you gutless wonders scared o’ hard work can take the Pill.’ He grinned nastily. ‘I don’t know for sure—but *this* Pill, I’ve heard, is neither fast nor painless.’

There was a brief silence after this speech, broken by the schoolmaster, Paul. 'When do we eat?' he asked.

'I've already told yer. At six, terrormor morning. Oh, is it *supper* yer worried about? We can soon fix that. Bill, give the old gent a mouthful o' rifle butt.'

The worst part of it all, that Clayton would always remember with shame, was that nobody went to Paul's help. They stood there, all the prisoners, and watched sickly. They shuddered at the crunch, flinched away as Paul spat out slimy blood and fragments of broken teeth. They gave way hastily as the big man, howling incoherently, lurched towards the arrogant lout behind the desk, his fists clenched and upraised. The harsh rattle of machine pistol fire was deafening—but when it was over the sighing moan from all of them as Paul crumpled to the floor was almost as loud.

'Got 'im, Major,' remarked the guard with the smoking weapon in his hand.

'Yes, yer got him.' There was neither gratitude nor commendation in the nasal whine. 'Yes, yer got him—but how many times must I tell yer ter aim low? I don't want these old bastards dead; I want 'em alive so's they can really enjoy their Corrective Detention.' He paused thoughtfully. 'This bunch o' nongs don't know the lay-out yet. The C Dormitory gang didn't pull its weight today—wake up the lazy swine, Norm, an' raise a burial detail. An' as for you J Dormitory bludgers, the sooner yer outer my sight the better I'll be pleased. Get a move on. Pick up yer badges at the door. An' when yer in yer scratchers, no talkin' after Lights Out—an' none before, either.'

'Git!'

Cowed, silent, the prisoners filed from the hall.

They were digging a ditch.

Clayton—or J17 as he was coming to regard himself—didn't know what the ditch was for, but suspected that it was part of some irrigation scheme. They were digging a ditch. Some few of them had been in manual work before their imprisonment, but the majority of them were from clerical occupations. They had no machinery to aid them, apart from the trucks that took them each morning to the end of the long trench. The economics of it all were, at first, rather puzzling—until Clayton realised that unpaid human labour, fed on the cheapest possible food, must be far less expensive than fuel—or power-hungry machines. They were digging a ditch—a long, straight furrow through the red sand from ... Nobody knew. To ... That, also, was a mystery.

The days were hot and dry, and water—brackish, sulphurous—was rationed. The food was barely adequate. The overseers carried whips as well as firearms. Life was a monotony of blistering day after blistering day, bitterly cold night after bitterly cold night. Men died. J43—he had been manager of a State grocery—broke away from the gang and ran off into the desert. Nobody tried to stop him. Some time later his workmates were shown his almost mummified body.

J3 broke open the pouch of his badge, but did not take the Pill himself. He tried to feed it to a half wild dog that hung around the camp in the hope of an occasional scrap of food. The dog, after a spasm of hideous vomiting, survived. J3, after the merciless beating-up he received, did not. J19, wielding his long-handled shovel like a battle-axe, killed a guard before he was shot down. He did not die at once; the machine pistols had been aimed at his legs. He was buried in the sand, with only his head above the surface, and left there to expire at leisure. The dingoes hastened the process.

They were digging a ditch—day after day, week after week, month after month. Sometimes they worked with other gangs, and even the vigilant guards could not put a stop to all conversation. On one such occasion Clayton thought that he saw a familiar face—that of Captain Starr, who had been Master of *Dantallis*. It could not be, he told himself. But it was. The two men managed a brief talk during the midday meal.

'That bloody Guild of ours!' swore the Captain. 'They finally got Senior Citizens' privileges for us ...'

'What happened?'

'I was sick, and I made a Christless cock of berthing my ship in Devonport. Only ten thousand dollars' worth of damage—that was all. It came on top of a scad of other troubles. Had a drink or two too many—and thought I'd try the famous Pill. Changed my mind—and chucked the bloody thing over the side ...'

A whip cracked viciously. 'Break it up, you useless old bastards! Break it up! J17—get to that end of the camp, on the double! M24—get to the other end! An' five demerits to each of you!' The whip cracked again.

One demerit meant one extra week of Corrective Detention. Like almost everybody else, Clayton acquired demerits. But he stayed alive. The day came at last when he appeared before the visiting Psychologist for his interview—and it was a day that he had feared that he would never see.

The Psychologist was, inevitably, a young man—but he wore a beard and his hair was long. He was very smart in his spotless white shirt and shorts, and Clayton was acutely conscious of his filthy, ragged overalls, of the smell of his sweaty, unwashed body. The Psychologist, lolling behind the desk in his borrowed office, looked at the prisoner tolerantly.

'Ah, yes. Clayton, Paul. Otherwise known as J17.'

'Yes, Doctor.'

'How do you *feel*, Clayton?'

*Thirsty*, thought Clayton. *Filthy. Hungry. Tired*. He said—and it was not altogether a lie—'Fit.'

'Fit. Ah, yes. You know, Clayton, Chairman Mao wasn't barking up the wrong tree when he ruled that the Chinese intelligentsia should be compelled, every so often, to engage in hard, manual labour. He is, today, largely discredited, but he was essentially a great man, and a very clever one ...' The Psychologist regarded Clayton over his steeped fingers. 'Yes, a great man. The Red Guard, for example ...'

'Yes, Doctor,' said Clayton. It seemed expected of him.

'But I digress. I see, from your papers, that you have been here for precisely sixteen months, three weeks and five days. The last of your demerits has been worked off, and you have acquired no fresh ones. During this period you have not used the Pill...' The suave young man laughed softly. 'If you had, of course, you would not be facing me now. You have not used the Pill, neither have you decided to use it and then changed your mind. You have, in my opinion, learned your lesson. For the remainder of your working life you will be a loyal and useful servant of the State.'

'You mean that I'm free, Doctor?'

The young man smiled benignly. 'Yes, Clayton, you are free—or as free as any of us is in this day and age. This afternoon the aircraft will return you and thirty others to your homes.'

'My wife, Doctor. Has she been notified?'

'She will be notified.'

'My job...?'

'That, Clayton, is up to your late employers. But, as well you know, the State does not tolerate idleness.'

'One last question, Doctor...'

'Yes?'

'This canal that we've been digging... Where's it from, where's it to? What's it for?'

The Psychologist chuckled. 'I'm afraid that's rather outside my ambit. I'm not a civil engineer. But I can answer the last question—What's it for? It's to rehabilitate people like you, Clayton. In the majority of cases it works. I hope, for your sake, that it works in yours.'

'But...'

'That will do, Clayton—unless you wish to incur further demerits. I have others to interview.'

Clayton left the office, brushing past the small queue that was waiting outside.

He was back in Port Keira.

Janine had not welcomed him. She was working—and he had good cause to suspect that her off-duty hours were very fully occupied. He, for at least a month, was not working. The Dan Line had not kept his job open for him, and young Missenden, the most objectionable of all the office juniors, was now occupying his desk. Bryson had been apologetic. 'I'm sorry, Clayton, but you know what it's like these days. There's always this pressure on us to give the young men their chance...' And then he had pulled his own Identity Card from his pocket and stared at the Pill in its transparent pouch. 'You know, Clayton, there're times when I wish I had the guts.' He almost shouted, 'But I have to hang on to what I've got!'

Clayton, finally, was found a job as an assistant clerk in one of the State supermarkets. The hours were long, the pay was poor. One afternoon the Manager, noticing that he seemed on the verge of collapse, sent him home early. It was a mistaken kindness. Janine was entertaining Ted Harmon in the bedroom of the apartment. And

Harmon, naked and guilty as he was, was more than a match for the wronged husband, had dressed unhastily and gone his way calmly while Clayton was still recovering from the blow that had floored him.

'At least Ted Harmon's a *man*,' Janine said coldly. She hadn't troubled even to throw a gown over her nudity.

The Identity Card had fallen out of Clayton's pocket. With shaking fingers he pulled the black tab, let the Pill roll out on to the palm of his hand. This time Janine did not try to stop him from taking it—and it was her callous lack of interest that revived his will to go on living. He threw down the pellet, scrambled to his feet, ground it into the carpet with his heel. He snarled, 'They can do what They like to me—but I'll get that bastard first!'

Janine promptly rang the Security Police. She said vindictively, 'It's my husband. He's done it *again*.'

'A Second Timer,' remarked F41 to H25.

'How do you know?'

'Your red badge, of course.' The wiry little man laughed bitterly. 'I should know. It was my idea—the different coloured badges. But I thought that I was safe.'

Clayton looked around cautiously. There were no guards in sight. It had started to rain, and they had all retired to the hut at the root of the jetty. The lighter bringing in the next shipment of supplies was still no more than a smudge on the horizon. The prisoners were safe enough where they were—to get to the beach along the pier they would have to pass the hut, and the sharks in the sea were known to be hungry and vicious. B30 and D56 had found this out, the hard way.

'You were safe?' asked Clayton, H25, curiously.

'Yes. When the Bill was pushed through it was understood that politicians weren't eligible for Senior Citizens' privileges—including *the* privilege. I was Member for Cammoewal. But with all the up-and-coming young puppies getting far too much control...'

'In any case,' remarked Clayton, 'I thought that politicians were supposed to be mature people.'

'Maturity my arse!' snapped the other coarsely. 'You mean to tell me that you haven't twigged yet what's behind it all?'

'The granting of the right of euthanasia to those deemed worthy of it.'

'Crap, and more crap! You're so naïve, H25, that you'd be better off dead. This old world's getting crowded, man, in spite of the Pill—not *our* Pill, but the first one that there was such a flap about—in spite of the so-called colonies on the Moon and Mars. And youth must be served, and youth has too damn many votes to be ignored. Youth resents waiting around in junior posts while old codgers like us are sitting pretty in the senior ones.'

'Follow?'

'Yes, but...'

'Let me finish. What's the most dangerous age, H25?'

'Forty five?'



'You said it. You've lived out half your allotted span. You're over the hill. Unless you've got somewhere you never will get anywhere. You've lost your resilience, and any set-back that you'd have taken in your stride a few years earlier knocks you for six.

'So ...'

'So you're passed over (as I was), or you find out that your wife's playing around, or ... or ... You name it, it happens to somebody, probably to you. And there, in its pouch on your new Identity Card, is the Easy Way Out. You take it—and there's room at the top for somebody. You change your mind—and the State gets ahead with its irrigation schemes, employing cheap labour, or builds some useless port that might be used twice a year. Roosevelt did the same sort of thing during the Great Depression, with his CCC—but he employed young hopefuls. We—*They*, I should say now—employ old no-hopers.'

'You must be joking.'

'I wish I were.'

Clayton grinned bitterly. 'There's still one thing worth hanging on for. I was given Two Years this time, and I've piled up a few demerits, but I'll be out ... And then ...' He flexed his hands.

'Revenge, H2S? Your wife, or her boyfriend?' The ex-politician laughed. 'You'll never be out. You had your one chance, and you muffed it. The Second Timers are in for keeps!'

'And you, you ... swine! You're responsible for this inhuman law!' Clayton lunged at the man, who stepped back hastily. The other prisoners watched apathetically. 'You stinking, rotten bastard!'

Still F41 retreated, never looking behind, keeping his eyes on Clayton. The jetty, a flimsy, ramshackle structure, was unrailled. F41, reaching the edge of the decking, tried hard to recover his balance. Had anybody extended a hand to help he would have done so—but, with a short yelp of shock rather than fear, he fell backwards into the sullen, rain-pocked, gently heaving sea. He could swim—but two black dorsal fins converged upon him. He screamed—and went down in a bloody flurry of foam.

Clayton stood there, looking down. He knew that this, for him, was the end, did not doubt that at least a dozen of his fellow prisoners would curry favour with the guards by blaming him for the death of the ex-politician. 'Second Timers are in for keeps,' the man had said. This, at the time, may or may not have been true—but it was true now.

The guards had emerged from their shed and were running along the jetty, pistols at the ready. Clayton poised himself to leap into the roiled, stained water, where dimly seen shapes tussled over what little remained of their meal. But he was afraid. He tore the badge from the breast of his coveralls, broke open the sac that held the Pill.

Without hesitation he swallowed it.

The sharks would have been a better choice.

## 'VISION' receives Australian honour

At the 9th Australian Science Fiction Convention held in Melbourne over Easter, VISION OF TOMORROW was voted the BEST INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL SCIENCE FICTION PUBLICATION, winning the magazine category of the Australian Science Fiction Achievement Awards ('DITMARS').

The full points score in the voting was:

1. (64 points) VISION OF TOMORROW (edited by Philip Harbottle).
2. (53 points) New Worlds (edited by Moorcock/Jones/Platt et al.).
3. (31 points) The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction (edited by Ed Ferman).
4. (28 points) Analog Science Fiction-Science Fact (edited by John W. Campbell).

We of this magazine are also very pleased to learn that our popular contributor LEE HARDING scored a landslide victory in the BEST AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION section.

The official place listing was:

1. (89 points) DANCING GERONTIUS (Lee Harding) from VISION OF TOMORROW.
2. (46 points) ANCHOR MAN (Jack Wodhams) from VISION OF TOMORROW.
3. (15 points) SPLIT PERSONALITY (Jack Wodhams) from ANALOG.
4. (13 points) KINSOLVING PLANET'S IRREGULARS (A. Bertram Chandler) from GALAXY.

The editor and publisher wish to extend their thanks to our many Australian readers and followers, who made the award possible, and also to our roster of contributors, both authors and artists. This award has served to encourage us to go on seeking to provide the best science fiction stories and artwork that are currently available, and to try constantly to improve our standards still further.

# FORBIDDEN PLANET

By **DAVID A. HARDY, F.R.A.S., A.F.B.I.S.**

My painting this month shows probably the most optimistic view possible of the surface of Venus—and if the surface *is* like this, it would be seen here during a few moments of exceptionally good visibility...

Not a very hospitable planet at all by all accounts, though we have a lot to learn yet about this enigmatic world which hides its surface under a perpetual blanket of cloud. Venus used to be called 'Earth's sister planet' in the older astronomy text books, but it now seems that only its diameter—7,600 against Earth's 7,900 miles—is similar. Twenty years ago it was often proposed that beneath the thick clouds, which were assumed to be of water vapour like our own, was a world of luxuriant vegetation and swamps, similar to the Earth during the Carboniferous era (about 280 million years ago). But other astronomers, finding no evidence of water in spectroscopic analyses of the planet, postulated a 'dust-bowl': Venus, they said, was a windswept desert and the clouds were huge billows of dust carried up by immense winds circling the planet. And as long ago as 1922 the scientists who formulated this theory suggested that the atmosphere of Venus contained large amounts of carbon dioxide, but no oxygen. Years later, this proved to be the case, and unfortunately the dreams of science fiction writers who wrote of lush paradises, virgin forests or Venusian natives were dashed to the dry, barren ground.

The clouds themselves are not dust, though, so some parts of each of these theories proved true. There were many other theories however; for example, in an attempt to explain why the carbon dioxide had not combined with other materials, like silicates, to form carbonates like limestone as happened on Earth, some astronomers suggested that Venus might be entirely covered with water. Soda-water, in fact, as the water would be charged with the gas!

Another hypothesis said that Venus had once had some water and huge quantities of hydrocarbons like petroleum. Under ultra-violet radiation from the Sun, the water molecules split into hydrogen and oxygen, the latter combining with the hydrocarbons to form carbon dioxide. When all the water was used up the result would be a huge ocean of oil and an atmosphere of carbon dioxide. The clouds would consist of a 'smog' of oily droplets.

Not until December 1962 did we begin to get any really reliable information on the mysterious planet; this was when Mariner II swept past and for 35 minutes beamed information to the Earth in what was then perhaps Man's greatest feat in space. Venus, it bleeped, has a temperature of some 430°C at the surface, but its cloud layer is cold, about -40°C. It has no magnetic field or belts of charged particles like our van Allen belts. Added to the information gleaned by radio-telescopes and radar in the 1950's, Venus

began to present a very strange and hostile picture.

In the first place, the surface must be baking hot—under a layer of ice! For the layers of carbon dioxide, ice crystals and water vapour give an immense 'greenhouse' effect, trapping the heat from the Sun and causing temperatures on the sunlit side to rise as high as 700°C. The pressure at the surface could be 30 times as great as Earth's, and the atmosphere is in such a turmoil that any mountain ranges—and there are radar indications of these—have probably been sculpted into weird formations, perhaps similar to the strange 'yardangs' found in the deserts of Central Asia, by sand erosion. Most of the time only a dull, reddish light would filter through from the Sun, and of course neither this nor any other celestial body would ever be clearly visible. Which is a pity, for at opposition the Earth would form a magnificent 'evening star' in the Venusian sky if it was clear, since it would be 'full' in phase, unlike Venus which is a narrow crescent at its closest to us. Venus has no moons, yet it exhibits a strange phenomenon known as the 'Ashen Light' when in crescent phase: this looks very similar to the effect of Earthlight on the Moon, and was long thought to be due to electrical displays like aurorae, but the results of Mariner and later probes seem to make this unlikely in view of the lack of magnetic fields etc.

This has made some astronomers doubt the validity of some of these readings, and it may well be that the situation is not so cut-and-dried as most popular books would suggest. In a recent paper, V. A. Firsoff points out that recent photographs taken in ultra-violet light show movement of dark markings which correspond to a retrograde rotation period of about four days instead of the 244.3 days (also retrograde) widely believed. Since this latter figure was used by the Americans to correlate the Mariner data, a discrepancy of this order would mean that these 'results' could be quite inaccurate. He also suggests that the Soviet *Veneras* may not have made either a parachute descent or a soft landing but were simply burnt out in an uncontrolled fall...

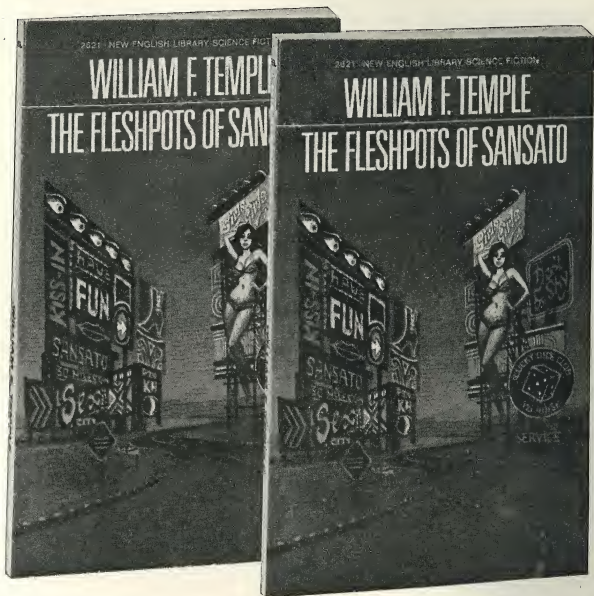
The fact remains that Venus is not likely to welcome space travellers with open arms (perhaps the famous statue was prophetic!). Will men *ever* land there in person? It presents many more problems than the Moon or Mars, but probably these will be surmounted some day; I would expect the astronauts to remain under the protection of their vehicles and living domes almost the whole time though. Perhaps one day some feat of 'planetary engineering' will disrupt the clouds and convert Venus into the tropical paradise of the early science fiction writers: it has been suggested that we might 'seed' the atmosphere with bacteria which convert CO<sub>2</sub> to oxygen. In the words of the song: 'It's too soon to know'.



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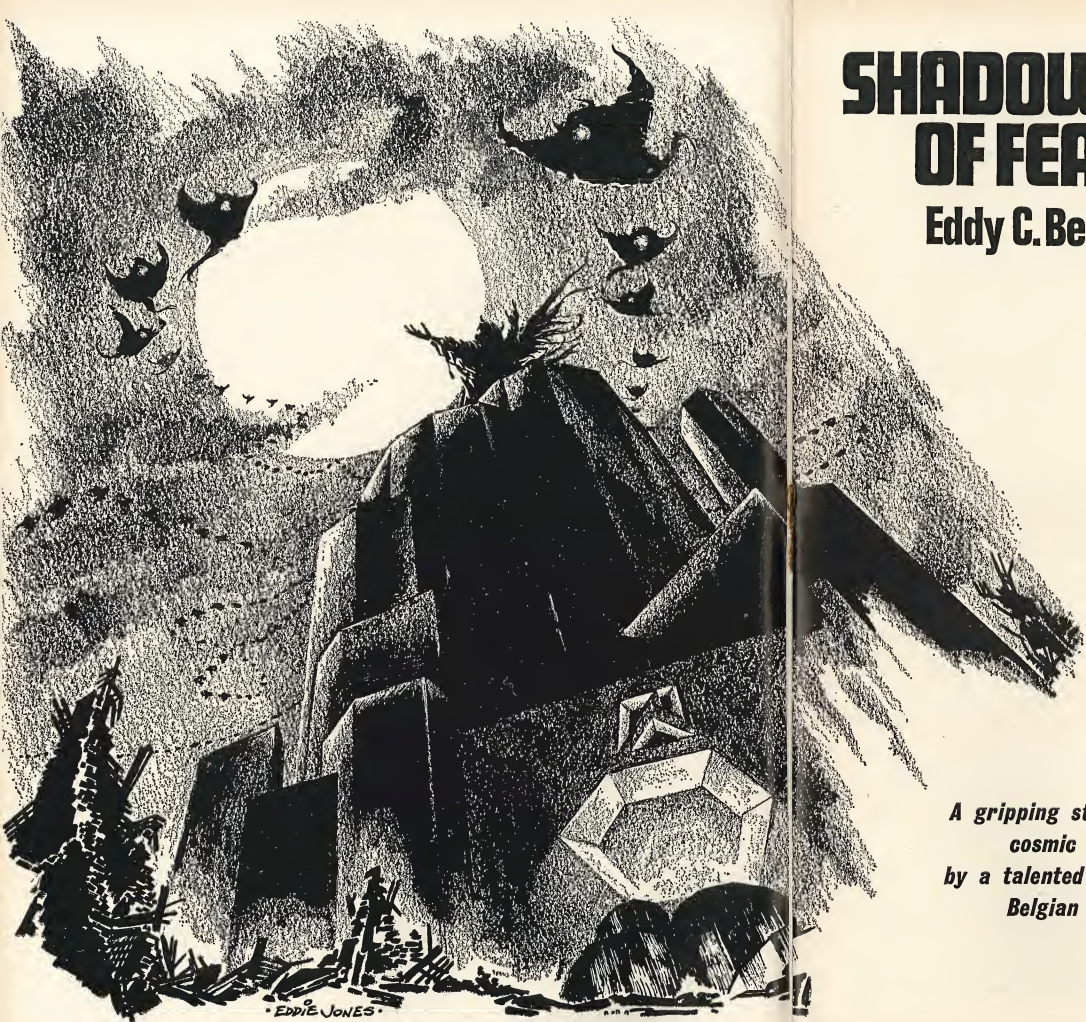


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• EDDIE JONES •

# SHADOWS OF FEAR

Eddy C. Bertin

*A gripping story of  
cosmic horror  
by a talented young  
Belgian writer*

The full moon spilled its cold light freely over the dead city, as the last man on earth carefully crossed one of the empty streets. The last man's name was Phillips. He had long since forgotten his name, and it didn't matter any more. He felt very old. He couldn't estimate how old; vaguely he remembered counting the days, with cut marks made on the walls of the buildings, but that was long ago. He had lost interest since then, as the Vval had gotten suspicious of the marks. His clothes were only rags now, and his beard was long, tangled and dirty. Washing was another forgotten luxury. The little hair he had left was dusty and grey. But old though he was, his eyes still burned with the mixed expressions of feverish hatred and fear.

He stayed in the shadows of the high empty-eyed buildings. It was a full-moon night, and the Vval were in the city. He shuddered, and continued on his way with the inaudible, sneaking steps of the hunted animal. He was lucky that the Vval weren't too bright. They knew that he was hiding somewhere in the dead city, the last living earth creature in the town whose population they had annihilated. And yet they were unable to hunt and catch him. Or maybe they just weren't interested enough and considered him as a beast in a zoo from which there was no escape, because the world was his cage. Or else they were just too damn lazy.

Phillips was chucking inwardly. The Vval really were lazy, big, fat and stupid. He liked to believe that, wishing that he could spit into their faces: thick, fat, lazy swine! Only they had no faces.

The houses were looking at him, with their large black windowless eye-sockets and gaping mouths, dark holes in their battered walls. In a sense, the empty city had become a living womb-creature to him, a caring mother, a protecting friend. And he needed a friend in this world of lurking horrors.

When running from the Vval, the city had showed him its hiding places. It had procured resting places when he was tired and food when he was hungry. The friendly dead-alive city was his sole protector against the Vval.

Suddenly he stopped dead in his tracks, his breath halting in his throat. It was something he had learned very fast, after he had noticed their peculiar way of seeing: the Vval only noticed moving things. From the moment he became immobile, he lost all interest to them. He might as well have been just another piece of stone or wrecked metal.

The Vval passed by without giving Phillips a glance. It was about six feet tall, and like all the Vval, it had a weird staggering way of walking. Leaning on its two short legs with the three-toed feet, it dragged its long lean arms along, the claw-like hands scraping trails in the dust. The wind bulged the fleeces between the creature's arms and its body, blowing them up and behind as dark wings.

The small cylindrical head of the Vaal was turning around, like a tank gun turret, the four lidless eyes, placed in one column above each other, supervising the





# REBEL PLANET

BY PETER L. CAVE

## ONE

Even through the thick triple glazing of the clubroom bar windows, one could hear the muffled roar of yachts as they taxied along the runways.

Ket Fontaine downed his fifth double whisky and sauntered outside to hail a service vehicle.

'Hangar 24,' he muttered to the driver and settled back into the plush upholstery of the old-fashioned crater-creeper.

He over-tipped the driver as he got out—a sure sign that he was depressed. Ket was in a strange, unsettled mood. His heavy consumption of liquor over the past three days hadn't helped to lift the feeling of frustration which had been closing in on him steadily.

He had promised himself a weekend at the Lunar Space Yacht Club, and here he was. Usually, the environment of the club was enough to fill him with a sense of excitement. There was something about the feel of the pseudo-gravity, the smell of rocket exhaust fumes hanging in the thin atmosphere, and the thrill of blasting off from the launch pad into free space.

But this weekend was different, and Ket could feel it in his bones. The thrill was gone, the sense of excitement and expectancy long evaporated. No matter what he chose to do, Ket knew it had all been done before. There was no sense of adventure left anywhere.

Ket Fontaine was suffering from a disease common to rich young men of the 23rd Century. He was bored.

If only there was some danger left, or some new place to go, new sights to see. Even Space-yachting was no



# THE BITTER PILL

A. Bertram Chandler

It had been a bad day in the office.

Bryson, the Branch Manager, was away sick—and Bryson was one of those men who never take subordinates into their confidence. In theory Paul Clayton, the Chief Clerk, was second in command—but in practice he was, and he knew it, no more than a senior clerk. He had been passed over so many times. Only two weeks ago Taylor, Branch Manager at Port Macdonald, regarded as the lowest rung of the Company's ladder, had been promoted to the much more important Phillipville Branch Office, and young Deems, a mere Assistant Accountant at Head Office, had been sent to take Taylor's place. In both years and Company seniority Taylor and Deems were junior to Clayton.

So Paul Clayton sat in the chair behind the Branch Manager's desk, in the Branch Manager's private office, knowing that he did not belong there, that he never would belong there. He tried to get down to some paper work—his own paper work—sorting out the loading times, gross and net, and tonnage rates of the Company's freighter, *Dankara*. The computerised version was, of course, already to hand—but the computer failed to make allowances for the sort of delays attributable to mere human inefficiency or, as was becoming more and more the case, sheer bloody mindedness. But it seemed that every time he started to tot up a column of figures the telephone would buzz insistently.

First of all it was Williams, Export Manager of Iron & Steel Products Incorporated, whose face appeared in the little screen. Clayton did not like Williams, a beefy, blustering man, a bully when he knew that he could get away with it, and Williams despised Clayton.

'Where's Bryson?' he demanded.

'Taking a sickie,' replied Clayton shortly.

'Oh, I suppose you'll do. Look, Clayton, about this shipment to Wellington. We've had the bloody stuff containerised and packaged for all of a bloody week. Where's the bloody ship you promised us?'

'*Dantallia*? She's been stuck in Newfort with main engine trouble. But she should be here tomorrow afternoon.'


'She'd bloody better be. It's bloody time you people scrapped the worst of your antique rustbuckets and got some decent tonnage. I needn't tell you that the County Line'd be glad of our custom, they'd just love to get one foot inside the door of your precious trans-Tasman trade! And if the Dan bloody Steamship Company can't give us service...' On those words Williams hung up abruptly.

Then it was the Chief Officer of *Dantallia*, an overly excitable young man, flushed with anger, even to his shaven scalp, calling to say that he was getting no co-operation at all from the Supervisor of Port Keira Stevedores, and that his carefully worked out stowage was being ruined. And then it was the Manager of Port Keira Stevedores, complaining that his Supervisor had been insulted by the Chief Officer of the ship...

At this juncture Captain Starr, Master of *Dantallia*, walked in.

**D.I.S. SENIOR CITIZEN**

No  
672505



672505

Name PAUL CLAYTON

Address 47-27 TOWER 9  
PORT KEIRA N.S.W. 1276

D of B 7-4-1953

Occ. CHIEF CLERK-DAN

Status MARRIED

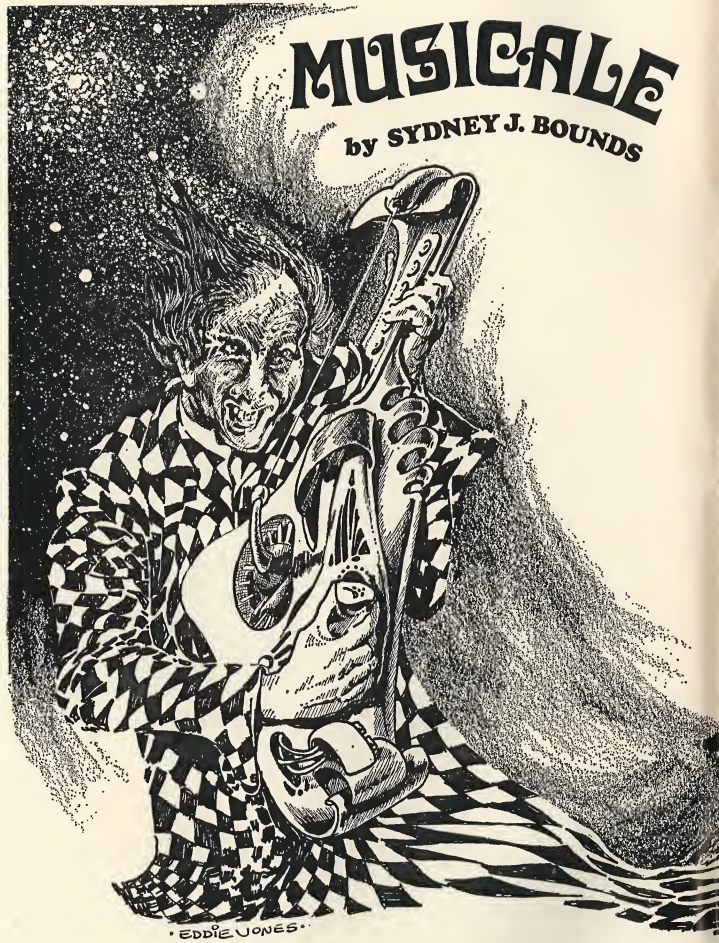
Sig. Paul Clayton

WARNING: THIS CARD MUST BE CARRIED WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES. ANY FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THIS INSTRUCTION WILL RESULT IN THE IMPOSITION OF SEVERE PENALTIES - DEPT. OF INTERIOR



# MUSICALE

by SYDNEY J. BOUNDS



Now that I have decided, finally, to write this journal, I wonder exactly where to start. The question has to be faced: will these pages ever be found and, if so, by whom? I can write only on the premise that my words will one day be read by human beings—any other assumption is now intolerable.

My name then: I have been known so long by the code-name Simon that I think of myself by that name. And it was as Simon that Carmen knew me. But I was christened Paul; Paul Windsor, of Burnham in the county of Surrey, born 1947.

I regret I cannot date these entries with any accuracy. If a calendar exists, I do not have access to it in the quietness of my sound-proofed cell. I have been so long in silence that I must assume I am a little unbalanced; but not mad, I insist on that despite the claim that sense-deprivation leads to psychosis.

As I look round my underground hide in the light of an oil lamp the first thing I see is, ironically, a print of *The Three Musicians* by Picasso, in the Philadelphia version. The print still holds its colour; gaily reminiscent of carnival time. I stare at the flat cut-out figures of harlequin, pierrot and monk, and horror overwhelms me.

Horror by association, and not due to the bizarre gaiety contrasting with bare insulation-boarding, the stack of empty cans and cartons. The air down here is sour, stuffy, and gives me a permanent headache. It feels damp in my hollowed-out hide beneath the ruined church at the cross-roads, half-buried under tons of rubble and mazed by a warren of secret ways for exit and access.

I have existed alone for weeks, months—who knows?—since Carmen was taken, cut off from the rest of England. Forget the rest of the world. Radio is taboo naturally. I have no contact left with free men anywhere and sometimes wonder if I am truly the last of the few. Somewhere, I tell myself, others must exist. *Must*. A few isolated people, perhaps even small groups. I cling to this belief during moods of depression, which grow increasingly more frequent as the weeks pass.

For what have I left now? Bare survival if I live as a mouse in a hole. No hope of anything... depression again... I must stir myself to some activity. Get out of here for an hour or two, despite the risk. I shall break off now and venture outside.

Back again, upset, but not seriously worried. It's possible one of the zombies saw me. If it really was Carmen, she would recognise me and know of this hide...

I had wormed my way up through the tunnel that comes out among the bracken and flopped on my back, staring up at the blue bowl of sky and drifting patchwork of cloud. I lay there, practising hearing; one quickly gets out of the habit, I find.

The birds still sing but their melody has a sour note now. Any melody does. Presently I began to hear the clicking of insects and knew my hearing had sharpened; it was time to move off.

There was no sign of life, but even so, I avoided the road and moved across country, imitating the typical zombie-slouch in case of watchers. Once before I escaped detection by this ruse; to run creates instant suspicion.

The air is fresh and clean, reminding me once again that I really must do something about my hide; though what, I don't quite know.

